

THE NEW CLARION

WILL N. HARBEN

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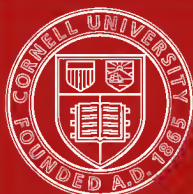
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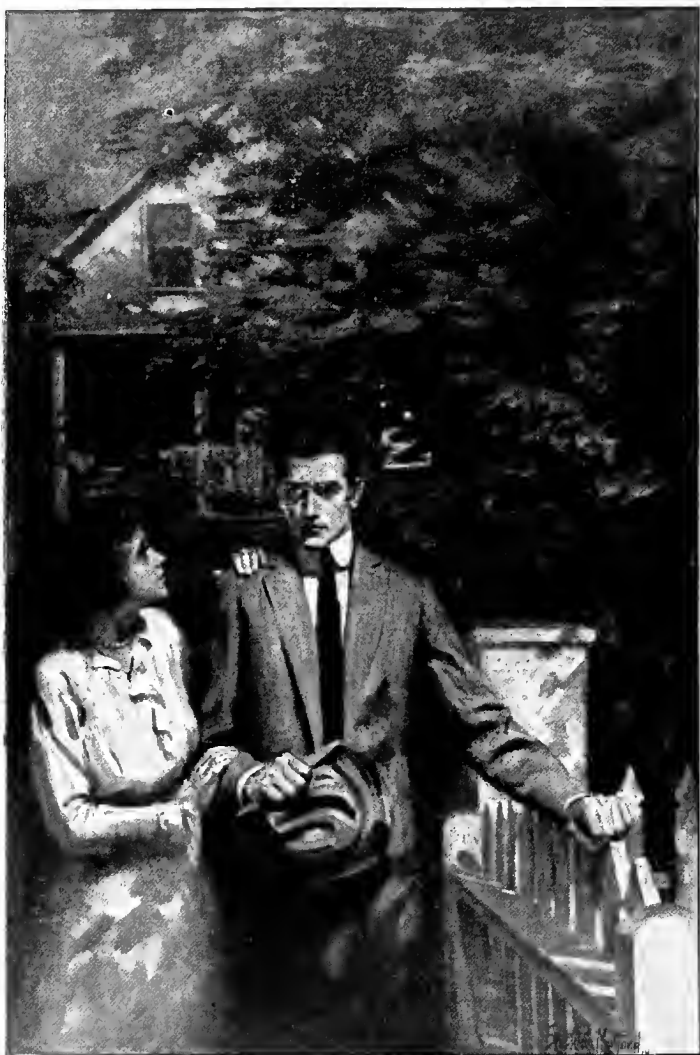


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"You must promise me," the girl urged. "I can't stand it, Howard. I shall not sleep to-night for thinking of what may happen any hour."

THE NEW CLARION

By WILL N. HARBEN

AUTHOR OF

"Abner Daniel," "The Desired Woman,"
"Mam' Linda," Etc.



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CHAPTER I

ABNER DANIEL leaned on the rickety gate in front of the farm-house and glanced down the roadway. He was tall, lank, thin-faced, with a tuft of gray beard on his chin and a merry twinkle constantly in his dark eyes. Some of his teeth were missing, which gave to his tanned cheeks a hollow appearance. He was about seventy years of age, but was as quick and active as a man of forty.

The farm-house belonged to Tobias Trumbley and his wife, Martha, and Abner, being unmarried and having no home of his own, boarded there. It was close to his own farm, which joined Trumbley's land on the east.

It was a warm summer afternoon. A spur of the Blue Ridge Mountains rose cool and blue in the distance, the near-by foothills with their rugged brows and sides sloping down to the level or rolling fields marked out in great squares by drainage ditches or crude rail fences, which were often hidden from sight by the riotous growth of briars, vines, and bushes.

Abner was watching a graceful figure approaching from the cross-roads store half a mile away. It was Mary, the only daughter of the Trumbleys, a young woman of nineteen or twenty years of age, of medium weight and height, who had a sweet face, blue eyes, and abundant chestnut hair.

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"I went to the store looking for you," she said, with a welcoming smile, as she reached the gate, "and when they said you hadn't been there I thought you had walked into town."

"So? so?" Abner said, curiously. "I hain't been fur off, though I mought as well 'a' been in the moon as fer anybody locatin' me. I was in my nest. I see you look astonished—well, I've got one. The reason I know Darwin is right about his big evolution idea is that the older I git the more comfort I git out o' bein' like a wild animal now an' then. When cattle or hosses fill their stomachs they lie down an' sleep, an' in hot weather like this right after dinner I climb up the hill thar among the thick pines an' lie down on a bed o' leaves and sleep like a log fer a couple o' hours. They say morphine and other drugs will induce sleep, but I hain't never run across anything that 'u'd send me adrift as quick as smellin' clean leaves, pine-needles, an' wild flowers. Did you want anything particular?"

"Yes; Mrs. Tinsley was here just after dinner." Mary passed through the gateway, and Abner noticed that she sighed as she spoke. "She seemed anxious to see you and was very much disappointed. She wouldn't stop, but went back home. I told her if I could find you I'd send you over. I knew you wouldn't mind. The truth is she is greatly troubled about something. Mother noticed it as well as I."

"Well, I'll go over to her house," Abner said. "It must be some'n' awful serious ef she didn't tell you two women about it, but, to do Sister Tinsley full credit, she never was much of a talker—that is, fer a *woman*. I reckon she'd give a quiltin'-party o' cluckin' hens a backset, but when she has some'n' to say she talks it right out from the shoulder. She's come to me fer advice several times, an' I always tuck it as a powerful high compliment an' give 'er the best in my shop. Yes, I'll step over thar an' see

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what she wants. Me'n' her git along all right, but I can't stomach that sanctimonious husband o' her'n. He's so ready fer the next life that he's out o' joint in this un, an' makes everybody else uncomfortable."

As he spoke Abner unlatched the gate and swung himself out into the roadway, smiling back at Mary as she disappeared in the house. Reaching the bend of the road at the corner of Trumbley's land, he saw Mrs. Tinsley, a short, rather large woman, slowly advancing toward him.

"Comin' back already," Abner mused. "She must be bothered about some'n' or other. Funny, but folks are gittin' to make a regular dump-heap out o' me in my declinin' years. They pile all sorts o' confidence on me from the fust twitchin's o' love to plans o' suicide. I've been called on to do every duty but bein' a nurse, an' that 'll come next, I reckon."

At this moment he noticed that Mrs. Tinsley had observed him, and was walking more rapidly, her head up, her eyes fixed on him expectantly. When she was quite near she pushed back her gray sunbonnet.

"I was over at your house, Brother Daniel"—it was the Methodistical form of address to a member of the church—"an', as Mary said she thought you might come back soon, I started over thar ag'in."

"I've just heard you was over," he said, doffing his slouch hat, scraping back his right foot, and bowing after the manner of an earlier period, "an' I was on my way to see you."

The glance of the woman fell to the ground. Her face held an anxious, care-worn expression, and her gnarled and toil-stiffened fingers twitched as she twisted a corner of her gingham apron between them. "You'll hardly forgive me for comin' to you with my troubles"—she made a failure of a smile—"but thar railly ain't anybody else to go to. You always seem to know what is best to do in a tryin' time."

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"I make a stab at it." He was jesting to put her at ease, for his sympathies were already stirred. "When folks are bothered any advice from any quarter is better'n none, an' I often say the fust thing that pops in my mind an' hope for the best. A woman stopped me at the wagon-yard in Darley t'other day. Her baby was fairly tied in a knot with colic, or some other inside complaint, and was squealin' like a pig wedged in a fence crack. I don't know what thar was in me, old bach that I am, that made her think I could help; but she axed me what to do. I advised 'er—long as she had no sort o' painkiller handy—to balance it on 'er knee upside down, trot it lively, an' hum a tune o' some sort. It worked like a charm. I don't know exactly how it happened, but the baby stopped yellin', maybe because all the wind was mashed out of it an' thar was nothin' to yell with."

"This is no jokin' matter, Brother Daniel," Mrs. Tinsley sighed. "I've come to see you about my boy. I'm so troubled that I can't sleep at night or get it off my mind in the daytime."

"Well, you needn't bother about Howard, Sister Tinsley." Abner was all seriousness and sympathy now. "Thar ain't a young man in the state I like better or count more on. He's true blue. He will make his way up the ladder as sure as he's got hands an' feet."

"Oh, I see you don't know—you haven't heard—"

"About him an' Mary? Oh yes, I've had my eyes on both of 'em. They'll come to an understandin' some day. Give 'em time; they are both young. Ef ever thar was a pair cut out fer each other from a divinè pattern it's them two. She's as bright as a new dollar, got a good common-school education, an' Howard is makin' a fine newspaper man. He will be editor of that sheet before long. Hillhouse is gittin' old an' careless. The *Clarion* would 'a' been in the ditch long ago if your boy hadn't put fresh life into it."

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"Oh, you don't know all," Mrs. Tinsley sighed. "Hill-house has not made it public yet. Brother Daniel, he's asked Howard to resign at the end of this week. He's jealous. Somebody told him Howard was the backbone of the paper, an' it made him mad. He is gettin' old an' cranky."

"Bad, bad, bad!" Abner cried, in disappointment. "Why, I thought Howard could hold that job as long as he wanted it?"

"Well, he can't; an' that ain't all. Him an' his pa is at outs. Last night when he told Hiram about it, Hiram flew all to pieces and talked to the boy like he was a dog. You know Howard won't join the church; him an' his pa has always disagreed on sech matters. Howard has a high temper, an' Hiram driv' 'im too far last night. He called the boy a low infidel, an' said he was disgracin' his family by his coldness in religious matters. They was just outside the door on the grass after supper, an' had a terrible wrangle. The upshot of it was that Howard told 'im to his teeth that the whole county looked on him as the biggest hypocrite alive."

"Oh, he said that!" Abner chuckled, impulsively; "the boy spit that out, did he? Well, well, that *must* 'a' raised a storm. The old man's heard that from a few, but comin' from his own son must 'a' struck deep."

"They came almost to blows," the woman groaned, softly. "I ran out an' stepped between them; but an actual fight wouldn't 'a' been any wuss than what tuck place. They set down, Brother Daniel, an' talked like two men that had been enemies for life an' had to settle something. Howard told him that as soon as his time was up on *The Clarion* that he was goin' West to stay. He says he can do well out thar, an' was glad this rupture come when it did."

"The boy has always talked it," Abner sighed, sympathetically. "He feels tied down here an' cramped, an'

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thinks he could do wonders in a new country. I was that way myself once. It gets in nearly every young feller's blood sooner or later."

The woman's shoulders shook, her breast heaved. "I simply can't stand to have 'im go," she faltered. "He's all I got in the world. He's headstrong an' hot-tempered. I wouldn't rest a minute after he left. I'd rather be dead than live on here with his pa without him. I'm talkin' plain."

"I understand," Abner said. "That is, I think I get your meanin'. Most folks know how harsh an' cold Hiram is, with all his cut-an'-dried religion. He don't know it, but he's harmin' his own denomination. The young are p'intin' at 'im an' sayin' ef that's what religion does fer a man they won't dabble in it."

They had turned and were walking toward her house, the low, gray roof of which could be seen above the apple and peach trees surrounding it.

"I'm goin' to speak plainer than I have ever done to a human soul," she said, her face growing pale, her lips held stiff. "I've hesitated to tell even God what I'm goin' to tell you. Brother Daniel, I married that man to please my father an' mother. They said I'd love 'im in time, an' I thought maybe I would. I was miserable till Howard was born, then I had some'n' to live for. Do you understand now—do you see? But now Hiram is drivin' my boy away, an' expects me to stay here an' be his drudge. I can't do it, an' I won't. God in Heaven couldn't expect it of any livin' mortal. I'd become a she-devil. I'd—I'd feel like killin' 'im. I can't live here without my boy."

"The thing has knocked me out, too," Abner said, seriously. "Everybody knows how I like Howard. Me 'n' him is like two young fellers, Sister Tinsley. We laugh an' crack jokes an' have our fun like frolickin' boys out o' school. When I'm with him I forget I'm an old man,

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an' he never seems to think of it. I've had 'im leave a gang o' youngsters many a time an' come to me for a fish or a hunt. Say, we must try to keep 'im here. We must hatch up some excuse or other."

"We can't; he really wants to go. He's ambitious to do something big in newspaper work. He says he has never had a fair show on *The Clarion*. Hillhouse takes the credit for every good line that he writes. Howard says he has to argue for hours before he can make him agree to print the very things he brags about afterward."

"That is a noted fact," Abner said. "Hillhouse is on his last legs. He is too old-fashioned for this rapid age."

Mrs. Tinsley was silent. She seemed overcome with emotion, for she put her hand to her lips and stroked them. They had reached the gate of her home, a one-story house with a little porch in front, a barn and other small buildings and sheds in the rear. Her husband, a man of medium height and weight, beardless save for a shaggy gray mustache, slightly stooped and quite bald, was pottering about among some beehives on the sparse grass of the lawn.

"Don't look like he's losin' sleep over it," Abner said, dryly, as he opened the gate and followed her in. "Is that the Bible he's totin' about under his arm?"

"Yes, he's studyin' up the next lesson for his class in Sunday-school. That's his chief pride. He talks it to me for hours on a stretch, sometimes when I'm so tired an' sleepy I can't hold my eyes open. He wants me to listen to him, an' ef I disagree in the slightest way he gits mad. How can I help disagreein'? His religion has done 'im more harm 'n' good."

"Ef you don't mind, I'll talk to 'im a little about Howard," Abner said. "I don't know that it will help matters; but thar may be no harm in tryin'."

"I wish you would," Mrs. Tinsley said. Leaving him at the door, she entered the house. Her husband had

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not noticed their approach, and now walked to a bench at the side of the house, which held a wash-tub and a battling-stick. He had taken his Bible from beneath his arm and seemed about to open it. His brow was puckered thoughtfully, the lids of his blue eyes were drawn so close together that only narrow slits appeared.

"Hello! How are you, old stick-in-the-mud?" Abner called out, in his usual jocular tone. "I seed you lookin' at your bees jest now. Expectin' them little flyin' bugs to give you a lot o' honey next time you bust into the'r humble domicile, eh? Looks like a man that walks with God as frequently as you do would take pity on His most industrious creatures. The longer I live the blinder you shoutin' Christians seem to git. Do you know I believe custom makes folks do all they do, an' the time is shore to come when bees an' silkworms won't be made to work hard to fill men's bellies an' kiver gals' legs."

"Humph!" Hiram snorted, with a contemptuous jerk of his fringed bald head. "I wonder why you never say a thing that has a bit o' common sense in it."

"I can't talk common sense to an uncommon man, an' that's what you are, Hiram. If the Lord had made you fust He'd 'a' made an army o' ordinary men out o' yore spare ribs. But no jokin', I stopped to talk to you about Howard. I'm sorry to hear the boy has concluded to go away. He's young an' quick-tempered, an' right now it looks to me like home is the best place fer a feller like him."

"*This* home ain't!" Hiram waved his hand in the direction of the house. "I raised 'im an' educated 'im to see 'im git too big fer his britches. He has the cheek to argue with me an' dispute what's laid down in this Book. He's wiser'n the Almighty Hisse'f, who gave His Word to live by. The young fool denies it all, I tell you, an' why he ain't struck dead in his tracks fer blasphemy I don't know."

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"Maybe he is more pleasin' to the Lord than you imagine." Abner sat down on the end of the wash-bench, and, crossing his long legs, swung his right foot up and down. "Howard may not see exactly the same meanin' in Scriptur' that you do. Me'n' him has had several talks along what you mought call doctrinal lines, an', to tell you the truth, he's give' me some good ideas. Why, what the boy believes is pine blank the same as Abraham Lincoln an' Thomas Jefferson gave out as their religion. Now, I hold, Hiram, that a young strip of a lad fetched up here in these backwoods who thinks with a man that was elected President over a big country and set the seal on the freedom of a race don't exactly deserve bein' kicked out o' home fer thinkin' his own thoughts. The boy is a product of his time the same as you are a remnant or hold-over of your'n, an' you ort to have more fatherly pride an' love'an to send 'im adrift amongst strangers."

Hiram jerked the Bible from beneath his arm, and, raising his foot to the bench, he opened the book on his knee. Rapidly he turned the pages, a fanatical gleam in his eyes. "I've got *authority* for my stand," he cried. "This Book tells me my duty plain enough. I don't have to go to a puny man like you, who is even now sayin' exactly what the devil prompts. Listen close to this an' see ef anything could possibly be plainer. Matthew 11, 35: 'For I'm come'—that's our Saviour speakin', remember—'I'm come to set a man at variance against his father—' No, that ain't it; wait! 'For a man's foes shall be of his own household—' That ain't it, nuther; here it is, verse 37: 'He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; an' he that loveth *son*'—hear that?—'he that loveth *son* or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.'"

"I ketch yore p'int," Abner smiled, slightly, "an' all I got to say is that I don't intend to let you nor no other crusty old duck like you interpret my Scriptur' fer me."

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Now, I've always thought that Jesus meant some'n' like this, for instance.¹ Ef a man had a son, we'll say, that wanted to go into hoss-stealin' fer a regular business an' invited his pa to help 'im out, why, the man was advised to part company with 'im, ef reform was impossible. But yore boy hain't done nothin' but read a little on fresh lines an' think fer 'isse'f. It is all in the way you look at it, you see. I don't want to be rough, Hiram, but I believe ef Jesus was to come up on us at this minute He'd tell you that in yore lack o' love an' kindness, both to yore wife an' son, you are a whole generation o' vipers an' hypocrites stuffed in one pair o' pants. He said, 'Judge not, that ye be not judged,' an' you are judgin' that boy's heart without seein' even the outside wrappin's of it. Jesus would say you was tryin' to git a mote out o' the boy's eye, when you have a beam in yore own as big as any piece o' timber that ever left a sawmill."

Tinsley was white with rage. Closing the Bible, he pushed it back under his arm. "I'll attend to my business, an' you attend to your'n," he panted, his lips quivering, his eyes flashing. "Your sort are leadin' the young of this community into damnation. You are the ring-leader, an' you'd have been turned out o' the church long ago ef you hadn't been so mealy-mouthed an' tricky. What do you know about this holy Book? Not more'n a crawlin' baby. I've studied it sence I was converted away back in my teens. Men of all sorts—divines an' college teachers, presidin' elders an' bishops—has consulted me as to this or that disputed point an' been plumb satisfied with the light I throwed on it."

Abner smiled soothingly. He paused a moment, then said: "I don't want to git in another wrangle with you, Hiram. Comin' on I said to myself that this 'u'd be *one* time I'd certainly not rub you the wrong way; but, Hiram, the only folks good enough to hold their tongues when you talk are angels flyin' around the throne of God.

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You say you have made a life study of that Book. I don't dispute it, an' right thar is yore greatest blunder. Jesus said—an' He's my teacher the same as He's yore's—He said that to love God with all yore heart an' yore neighbor as yorese'f was all the law an' the prophets. But what are you an' yore hair-splittin' sort doin'? Why, you are simply rotten with pride over the million or more twists an' turns you give every line laid down in the Old as well as the New Testament. Jesus said that to git the real idea you had to become as a little child in simplicity; He said that, while you admit it's tuck you a lifetime to learn what you know on the subject. Just think of it, Hiram, an' have some sense once in yore life. Thar's fully a million things to learn in that concordance you study so much before eternal life kin be secured, an' yet the thief on the cross, a pore ignorant chap, passed his examination in only a few seconds. It won't do, I tell you; it won't do! God loves all His children, an' I don't believe any man-made diploma will pass a man in at the pearly gates. Then thar was the woman He told to go an' sin no more. Did He tell her to go study Greek an' Hebrew an' start a debatin' society over the derivation of words? Not on yore life. Hiram, I've come to you to try to git you to deal gentle with Howard. The boy—"

"I'll deal with 'im as I see fit!" Tinsley burst out, furiously. "He's tuck up his quarters at the hotel in town, an' I understand he's goin' to stay thar till he leaves the country. It suits me all right. He is a disgrace to me an' all his kin."

With his head down, his eyes flashing, the speaker moved away. Abner stood still and watched him disappear behind the house in the direction of the barn, then he turned toward the gate. The sun was down and the evening shadows, filled with fine floating dust from the dry fields and road, were spreading over the land-

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scape. He was on his way homeward when, hearing his name plaintively called, he looked back toward the house he was leaving. It was Mrs. Tinsley, and she came out at the gate and approached. With a sheepish smile Abner went to meet her.

"You come to a powerful pore hand for help when you come to me," he said. "I can't budge that feller an inch. He's the sort that will have his way or die."

"I didn't think you could influence him," Mrs. Tinsley sighed. "Well, I told you about myself. I can't live on here with him after my child goes. I simply can't, and I won't try."

She lapsed into silence and stood with eyes on the sunset, her strong face full of despair. He took a deep breath.

"I understand," he answered. "I don't blame you, an' yit it would be a' awful scandal. Howard would feel it all the rest of his life. Thar's only one thing to do now, an' that is to try to persuade the boy to stay at home. Some'n' must be done. I'll see 'im to-morrow in town."

CHAPTER II

THE next morning Abner drove to the village of Darley. He had a bale of cotton on his wagon. He unloaded the cotton at the main warehouse, where he unharnessed his horses and tethered them to a hitching-post in a vacant lot near by. In a grocery store across the street he secured two small boxes into which he put some oats. At the same store he borrowed a pail and watered the horses from a well in the middle of the street. After this was done Abner went into the Johnston House, an old three-story brick hotel built long before the Civil War.

He turned from the main lower corridor into the wash-room on the right, and, filling a basin, he bathed his face and hands. There was an endless towel on a wooden roller against the wall, but Abner did not use it. Instead he wiped his face and hands on a huge red handkerchief. Tied to a string, and hanging against a mirror like a mason's plumb, was a black-rubber comb; but Abner was independent of that also, for he took a folding one from his vest pocket and stroked his hair and beard vigorously. A negro office boy came in with a whisk broom and a box containing blacking and brushes.

"Shine, boss?" he asked, politely.

Glancing down at his dust-coated shoes, Abner shook his head. "No, I believe not," he said. "I ain't goin' to meet women folks to-day. These are my work-clothes, an' this cowhide won't take a polish. They are soaked with mutton suet to make 'em shed water, an' no blackin'.

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you coons ever handled will stick tight enough to shine ef you rubbed till night."

A well-dressed young man, who looked like a drummer, entered, and the boy began brushing his clothes. Abner sauntered into the hotel office and, approaching the clerk's counter in a corner of the room, he leaned on a small showcase for cigars. The clerk, a middle-aged man by the name of Sugart, was sorting some letters and placing them in the numbered pigeonholes which held the keys of the various rooms.

"Cigar, Mr. Daniel?" he asked, cordially.

Abner pointed through the murky glass. "That un looks like a pore man's smoke," he said, dryly. "Are they two fer a nickel?"

"Three for a dime, Mr. Daniel. They are pretty good for the money. Good tobacco stock's gone up in market, but we get these at the old figure."

"Well, I'll tie on to three." Abner laid the coin on the glass and picked the cigars from the box himself. "Ef they crumble I'll stuff 'em in my pipe." He lighted one and carefully placed the others in his coat pocket. "Say, Tom," he went on, carelessly, as he puffed out the smoke, "have you seen Howard Tinsley around this mornin'?"

"Yes, he was in at breakfast; he's staying here regular now. Say, what's wrong between him and his pa, Mr. Daniel?"

"I don't know as thar is anything out o' the way." Abner's lashes flickered over a pair of steady brown eyes. "What makes you ax that?"

"Oh, Howard doesn't keep back anything from his friends, and I am one. He didn't say what it was about, but when he engaged his room here yesterday he was mad as Tucker. He intimated that he had been ordered away from home. I reckon old Hiram is too hard on him."

Abner's forehead wrinkled between his bushy brows. "I don't keep track o' sech things," he said. "Ef thar

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is any misunderstandin' I reckon it will git smoothed out. Old Tinsley means well, an' so does Howard."

"There won't be any smooth-out this time," the clerk smiled, knowingly. "Howard's had enough on all sides. Hillhouse won't give him any show here in town, and his father won't out home. He's going West to grow up with the country. He's got his eye on some new, booming town in Texas. He is a rising newspaper man; the best judges say so. You are going to take dinner with us, ain't you?"

Abner nodded as he took up a pen and wrote his name on the register. The clerk turned the book around and penciled a big D after the signature.

"It will be ready in twenty minutes," he said.

When he had eaten his dinner, in the company of some farmers whom he knew, at a long table in a corner of the big, cool dining-room, Abner came out into the office and began to smoke another cigar. He turned to the clerk with a quizzical smile. "I reckon thar wouldn't be an arrest made ef I shucked off my coat, would thar?" he asked. "The fact is, I'm full o' hot coffee an' feel like the boiler of a steam thresher at full tilt."

"Free country, Mr. Daniel," Sugart answered, with a laugh. "I'd have mine off, but I'm expectin' some ladies in at any minute."

With his coat on his arm, Abner stood around the office for half an hour, his glance constantly on the entrance.

"Looks like Howard ain't comin' at all," he mused. "I don't want to go about that newspaper, but I reckon I'll have to. I'd rather take a beatin' than go back to that pore old woman without some word or other. Lord, Lord, this is a funny world—worry over yorese'f till you are too old to keep it up, an' then begin botherin' about some young person with his worries in front of 'im."

Passing out into the street on which the midday sun

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was beating mercilessly, and where scarcely a human being could be seen save a cluster of lazy negroes around a flat-topped dray in the shade of a sycamore-tree, Abner walked down to the next corner. Here, at the stairway entrance of an isolated two-story brick building, swung on rusty iron supports a weather-beaten sign bearing the almost obliterated words: "*The Clarion*. John Hillhouse, Editor and Proprietor. Founded 1848. Job Printing."

The stairs leading up to the office above the general-merchandise store-room, which had not been used since the town's better commercial days, rose sharply from the sidewalk. The worn steps looked as if they had not been swept for a month. Gusts of wind had driven in dust and rubbish from the street, which, added to the refuse from above, made the way all but impassable. Reaching the open door at the top of the stairs, Abner, with his coat still on his arm, his shirt-collar unbuttoned, glanced in. The room was long and well lighted, for the windows were unusually high and unshaded except where newspapers were pasted against the panes of glass. A thin-looking girl seated on a high stool setting type glanced up and nodded wearily. Stalking in, Abner inquired after Howard. The girl tossed her head in the direction of a closed door in the rear. "He's in Mr. Hillhouse's office helping him out with an editorial."

"Oh, that's it," Abner said. "Well, I'll hang about here till he's through. I've got plenty o' time, Miss Lizzie. I don't want to hit that road to perdition till it's cooler. I fetched my team in with me. I 'lowed maybe Howard would like to ride out on my spring-seat."

"I don't think he would go out to-night." The girl's wan face took on a look of faint interest. "The young folks are giving that Atlanta girl, Cora Langham, a dance at the hotel, where she is stopping with her mother; and,

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as Howard is leaving soon, the boys say it is in honor of both of them."

"I see." Abner's face fell. "I heard he was thinkin' o' makin' a change o' some sort. Has he landed anything yet?"

"I don't think he has; he has written a lot of letters, but he hasn't heard anything favorable. Howard says he thinks he may have to wait till he gets there, but that looks risky to me."

Abner's head rocked thoughtfully. On a table at his right lay some recent issues of *The Clarion*, and, picking one up, he scanned it critically. "Say, I ain't no judge to speak of, Miss Lizzie, but this sheet has fell off powerful lately, if I ain't mistaken. It is a bum-looking paper to me. It used to have spice an' ginger in it."

"Everybody knows it is on its last legs," the girl said, tartly. "I'm ashamed to set up the rubbish Mr. Hillhouse writes. He is too old-fashioned to put in what Howard gets up, and he is too old and cranky to write well himself. Howard simply had to leave. Last week he had the finest editorial you ever read up in type when Mr. Hillhouse saw it and threw it out. It was an article on the great natural advantages of Darley and the surrounding country. Howard intended it to boom the section. He believes this town could be built up if the people could be induced by a live paper to use their energies. But Mr. Hillhouse sneered at every line of it—said it was rubbish from first to last. Oh, nobody that knows the facts could blame Howard for what he said."

"What he said? Then it sort o' got the boy's dander up, did it?"

The girl ducked her head and laughed softly. "You'd have thought so if you'd been here. He raked the old man over the coals. Howard has an awful temper, and he let it out that day to its full length. He told Mr. Hillhouse"—Miss Lizzie giggled, impulsively—"that he

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had moss on his back six inches long, and couldn't walk for the dry-rot that was eating him up bodily. I was scared a little, for I thought they were going to fight, but they calmed down after they agreed to separate. I'm sorry for Howard; he thinks he has been wasting time. He thought Mr. Hillhouse would give him some rein when he began on the paper, but he hasn't had a bit."

At this moment the door opened; and Hillhouse, a tall, gray-bearded, thin man in the neighborhood of seventy, entered, with a frown of general weariness on his colorless face. "Heard you inquiring for Howard," he said, with a casual nod to Abner. "He will be out in a minute. He and I have been shaping up an article on the state prison laws. Howard knows pretty well how to form an editorial when it comes to grammar and syntax in general, but he has to be checked. He fairly runs wild at times."

"I see; he needs the blue pencil," Abner said, with a sly look at Lizzie and an amused twinkle in his eyes. "I kin always tell the lick of an old experienced hand. I don't have to read fur to recognize *yore* touch, Hillhouse. You've got what some mought call the sense of the ridiculous, an' it bubbles up an' swells out whenever you stick pen to paper. Now the article you writ two weeks ago advocating more breadth in human ideas in general, specially religious matters—why, I don't want to flatter you, old man, but that thing tickled me powerful, and not me alone. I seed fellows out our way clean along to Springtown handin' it about an' chucklin'."

Hillhouse's face darkened. "I didn't write that," he all but growled. "In fact, I didn't see it before the paper was out. I was off that week. My wife was on a visit to her sister in Augusta, and I had to run down there to see her. You and a few like you may have liked it, but I am not catering to any select element. I am printing a conservative paper. Two of the best citizens in this

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town told me if I didn't cut that sort of stuff out they would turn their influence against me. I reckon you have heard that Howard is leaving me? It had to come. We can't possibly agree. Like most young men just starting out, he thinks he knows it all. To a man like me, that has had a long life of experience and a thousand rubs and knocks, a fellow like Howard is simply a hot-headed school-boy that needs paddling. I know I feel better since we have agreed to part. I don't know why it was, but the boy got on my nerves. You see, I had to watch him day and night for fear that he'd damage my interests."

"The boy will do to watch." Abner threw another meaning glance into the receptive face of the type-setter. "I know I'm goin' to watch 'im from this on wherever he goes. He is the sort that makes history, cuts out fresh roads, an' crosses untried waters. Men of progress has always been hampered, abused, an' even killed."

Hillhouse sniffed audibly. He was about to reply, but Howard came in with some sheets of copy which he held out to Hillhouse with a weary look. "It is as you want it now, I think," he said, as he smiled at Abner cordially. He was above medium height, had a fine shock of chestnut hair, a pair of frank blue eyes, a massive brow, and by many was considered good-looking.

Hillhouse was hastily scanning the copy. "Yes, it will do now," he said, testily. "The Lord knows I had enough trouble to make you catch my idea." Therewith Hillhouse laid the copy before the type-setter and left the room.

"I tuck dinner at the hotel hopin' you'd come in to eat," Abner began, rather lamely; "but, as you didn't, an' as I had nothin' particular to do till leavin'-time, I thought I'd drop in."

"I am going up now," Howard answered. "Tom Sugart usually holds my dinner for me when I'm late. Would you mind going back with me?"

CHAPTER III

ABNER was agreeable, and together they left the office. At the hotel the two entered the dining-room. No one else was there, and while Howard ate his dinner his old friend sat by him and smoked.

"So you are really goin' West?" Abner said, tentatively. "Well, I'm sorry. I'll miss you right sharp. It will seem powerful strange not to see you about. Why, I've watched you since you was knee-high, in every stage o' the game from shirt-tail to necktie an' standin' collar."

"Yes, I've simply got to change," Howard smiled, appreciatively. "You see how I'm situated both at home and here. I've stood it as long as I can, Uncle Ab, and keep my self-respect. Why, do you know I actually felt as if I were going downhill instead of up, and I've always wanted to accomplish something in life."

"I know," Abner returned, sympathetically. "I had a lots to contend with myself when I was growin' up. I didn't think I was treated right, nuther. You are an only son, but thar was two of us—me'n' my brother Sam. Sam was the baby; he met with a mishap when he was about ten. He scratched his ankle on a rusty nail when we was playin' seesaw on a pile o' old planks, an' blood-poison set in. He had to be nussed careful fer a long time; his life hung by a thread, as you mought say, an' I was pushed aside. Then, when he was older, Sam got wild. He tuck to whisky-drinkin' because he was of a gentle, friendly disposition, I reckon, an' after pa died ma worried so much that she had no thought fer me. As I see it now,

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she knowed I was solid enough, an' so she never give me much attention. Well, I was hot-headed like you. I fumed over it all in secret, an' finally cussed out the whole business, uncles an' aunts, an' even ma, an' went right whar you are plannin' to go—to Texas. The point I picked was a frontier place whar the scum as well as some o' the best o' humanity had collected. It was a wide-open town, I'm here to tell you, an', bein' young an' full o' ginger, I tuck to it like a hog to its wallow. Thar was gamblin'-houses, keno, women, whisky, cowboys, leg-shows on Main Street in broad daylight, an' what not? Now an' then I was bothered about home an' these grand old mountains, but I tuck a drink, played a game o' poker, an' managed to keep from thinkin' of it. I never even writ back home. Whenever the thought would come stealin' on me, as it did sometimes away in the night when I was returnin' from some shindig or other, I'd tell myself that it had nothin' to do with me an' take my mind off of it. I was makin' money dealin' in hogs an' cattle, an' that was sorter excitin'. Say, it ain't no business o' mine, Howard, but who is that high-steppin' gal comin' in?"

Howard looked across the room. The young lady, seating herself at a smaller table near a remote window, smiled and nodded. Returning her smile, bowing, and flushing slightly, Howard said:

"That's Miss Cora Langham, of Atlanta. I'm sure you've heard about her."

"You bet! So that's the gal you boys are all so daft about? Well, I don't blame you, even at my age. I always did sorter fall to yaller hair when it's full and fluffy like her'n. Then she is pretty trim, and she certainly does know how to wear her best duds. She's got the proper eyes, too. At this distance they look as blue as violets dipped in a spring. What was I talkin' about? By gum! a sight o' that sort drags me right away from

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common matters. Le' me set here five minutes longer an' I'll be axin' you fer an invite to the blow-out to-night. A body kin say what they like agin the flapdoodle stuff up-to-date women wear, but healthy men like it when it's hung on the right sort o' rack. Le' me see—what was I sayin'? Oh yes, about my trip West. Look at 'er; I'll bet my hat she knows we're watchin' 'er—she knows *you* are, anyway. Thar is a certain lay of the eyelash to a gal's face that's a dead give-away at times."

"I shall tell her of your admiration," Howard laughed. "She won't object, I assure you. She likes old men as well as the young. But go on with what you were saying."

"I was leadin' up to some'n' powerful strange," Abner resumed, quite serious now. "You may know I never was much of a hand to believe in ghosts, hobgoblins, or sperits of any sort, but the very oddest thing that ever happened to me tuck place one night. I was sleepin' in a lonely shack away out on a ranch whar I had a few cattle about ready for market, when I woke up at twelve o'clock. I was awake or powerful nigh it when I had a feelin' that somebody was in the room. I set up an' looked about, an' then as plain as day I seed my brother Sam come close to the bed an' look at me. I called out, I did, an' said, 'Why, Sam, whar did you come from?'"

"It seemed to me that he hesitated, an' to this day I can't say whether it was a voice I heard or what it was; but it seemed like Sam sorter groaned an' said, 'Go back home to mother; she needs you.'"

"All at once he melted away—jest vanished like light when a candle is blowed out. I heard a cricket chirpin' an' seed the moonbeams shinin' in at a window whar he had stood. I jumped up an' opened the door an' looked all about, but thar wasn't a livin' thing in sight."

"It was all fancy," Howard said. "It is wonderful what the imagination will do at certain times."

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"I don't know that it was *all* fancy," Abner returned. "Wait till I git through. I laid down in bed ag'in. I was plumb tired out, but I couldn't sleep. I had the awfulest feelin' I ever had. I simply couldn't feel right. Ef I had been in the lowest depths o' hell I couldn't have suffered more. The feeling stuck to me till daylight broke. I got up an' uncovered the coals in the chimney an' made my coffee and fried my little dab o' meat, but I wasn't as hungry as usual. I went out on the range an' met some o' the men that was workin' with me. I told 'em about it, but they all laughed an' said it wasn't nothin' but a dream. Now, I mought think that, too, ef some'n' else hadn't happened. About two weeks later I run across a chap that used to live back here. He happened to have a copy of a home paper, an' he let me read it. It was the fust news of any sort I'd read in several years. Now, what do you think? In that paper was an account of Sam's death. He died the very night, an', as I learned afterward, at exactly the time I thought I seed him."

"A rare coincidence," Howard said. "Now and then such things happen, and people of credulous minds attach importance to them."

"Well, even so, it made a change in me. I tried to throw it off an' go on with my business, but I simply couldn't. From mornin' till night Sam was on my mind. When we was little chaps me 'n' him was like Siamese twins. I remember when we started to school for the fust time. The teacher let us set at the same desk fer the fust month, an' then tuck a notion to part us. I never suffered so in my life—seemed like the whole world was crooked. We'd got used to each other, you see. Well, somehow after I heard he was dead an' gone forever—man though he was—I felt different about 'im. Every bad fault an' habit of his was forgot. He was jest the old Sam of our boyhood when we used to fight fer

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each other. I cried a lot when I was alone, an' I prayed, too. Maybe you don't know it, but the death of a dear one will turn a body to God quicker 'n anything else in the world. Well, the upshot of it was that I sold out my business, lock-stock-an'-barrel, an' without writin' a word I tuck the train back home. I got here to Darley about seven o'clock in the evenin'. I was tired an' hungry, but I didn't stop to eat, but walked right out home. It happened that I didn't meet a soul I knowed on the way, an' I got to ma's house without her knowin' I was anywhar nigh. It was cloudy an' dark, but I seed a light in the kitchen and went toward it. The door was open, an' I stood back an' looked in. Thar she was—thar mother was, all by herself, draped in black from head to foot, even to the black sunbonnet she wore in the house or out. I watched 'er piddlin' about with 'er few cookin' things an' wondered ef that really could be her. She was so frail an' thin an' bent over like, an' I noticed that her hands trembled an' she kept droppin' knives an' spoons. Lord, Lord, Lord, talk about feelin'! Why, I had actually never before realized how much I owed 'er, an' how bad me 'n Sam both had treated 'er. Thar she was all alone in 'er grief without a soul to keep 'er company. I hardly knowed what to do, fer I was afeard of startlin' her; but I called out like travelers do, you know, an' she come to the door an' looked out sorter cautious like. Then I stepped into the light. I had growed a full beard, an' my cowboy clothes and sombrero hat had changed my looks, too, so she tuck me fer a stranger. Then I told 'er who I was. Howard, ef I could live ten million years I'd never forget that sweet, patient old face as she stared at me, unable to believe I was tellin' her the truth. She shook her head slow-like. 'No, sir,' she said, 'Ab's dead—both my boys are dead now. Little Sam died a short time ago, but Ab's been gone a good many years.'"

Abner's voice quivered. His lips twitched. He reached

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out and flicked the ashes of his cigar on the floor. He glanced toward the young lady across the room, and then looked down at Howard's plate, in which Howard had rested his knife and fork.

"Ef you are through with the solids," he said, "an' want to taper off on some'n' real fine, I'd advise you to make that nigger fetch you a slice o' that lemon-custard pie. I had two pieces myself. Dick Turner was with me at dinner, an' he don't go in fer sweet stuff. I hated to see his piece go back to the kitchen, so I slid it onto my plate."

Howard smiled, and, calling the waiter, ordered the dessert mentioned. "Won't you take some, too?" he asked.

"Do you suppose they got it to spare?" Abner inquired of the negro.

"Plenty of it, boss," the waiter replied.

"Well, fetch her in," Abner said. "I don't want to be greedy, but that pie is neck an' shoulders ahead o' anything I've run across in many a day."

They were eating their dessert when Abner said:

"I was goin' to tell you about ma, an' how she acted when I come back home. Seein' that she didn't know me, I tuck 'er by the hands an' kissed 'er an' petted 'er till finally she understood that it was really me. She turned white an' mighty nigh keeled over in a faint. We set down by the fire in the kitchen, an' she babbled on like a happy child over a new plaything. She'd grab my hands ever' now an' then, an' rub back my hair, an' go on at a terrible rate. Suddenly she jumped up an' went out at the door, an' I heard 'er go 'cross the potato-patch behind the house to the fence of a neighbor's house an' call out:

"'Hello in thar! Sally—all of you—come to the door quick! Ab's back home; he's alive an' settin' in thar by the fire.'" Daniel's voice shook again; but he swallowed the yellow morsel on the tip of his knife and con-

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tinued: "It was the fust time that I knowed the meanin' o' home, an' it was sweet, I tell you, sweet! I remember that night, after I was in my old bed in the little shed-room whar I used to sleep as a boy, she come creepin' in—soft-like, to keep from wakin' me—an' tiptoed about, feelin' the quilts to see ef I had enough cover. Lord, I was so full o' joy an' gratitude that I couldn't speak! It was a miraculous thing that had fetched me home to her in her old age, an' I always listen to such odd accounts with respect. I thank God I was some comfort to ma; but to the end o' my days I'll be sorry that I was away from 'er all them years. Ef I could wipe out that part o' my life I'd ax nothin' better. I never knowed how much I owed 'er till I seed 'er coffin toted out o' the front door that summer day. Say, Howard, my boy, you are about to do the very thing I done away back thar—you are goin' off an' leave yore mother."

"The case is not the same," the young man said, frankly. "My mother has my father to see after her. He can give her every comfort."

Abner slowly shook his head. "A boy as young as you are never could see into a mother's heart. Yore ma needs you every bit as much—maybe more, when all is considered, than my mother needed me. You could never imagine the agony she'll be in ef you go away. The bare thought of it has already upset 'er powerful."

Howard pushed his plate back and frowned. "I know you mean well, Uncle Ab," he said, firmly, "but I can't afford to be influenced even by what you say. The question comes up before nearly every ambitious young man. He faces two duties, one to his parents and the other to himself and his future. My grandfather and my father left their homes early in life. I want to accomplish something, and there is no opening here. That old fossil of an editor is killing all the energy and pride I ever had, while my father wants to—"

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"Oh, I know all that," Abner sighed. "Still thar is yore ma. She can't stand it, I tell you, Howard. It will take life an' hope out of 'er. She's havin' all she kin bear as it is."

Howard was silent as they rose and left the room. Outside he laid his hand on the old man's arm. "Don't say any more about it, Uncle Ab," he said. "It will go hard with my mother, I know. Still, if I make my way she will be glad that she did not hold me back."

They parted on the street-corner. Abner turned down to where he had left his team. He glanced up at the sun, and examined the boxes from which the horses had eaten. "I don't want to go home a bit with this news. Pore woman! She 'lowed I could help 'er. She'll see now that I'm as helpless as anybody else."

CHAPTER IV

IT was sunset when Abner drove his horses out of the town into the main mountain road which led through the foothills to his home. It was twilight when he reached Trumbley's stable. The bars were up, and he got down from his seat and lowered them. Then he clucked to the horses, and they drew the wagon into the lot. As he was unharnessing the perspiring pair he observed the light in the windows of the kitchen and dining-room of the farmhouse. Tobias Trumbley, a short, thick-set man of middle age, with a head of coarse, iron-gray hair, came out with a bucket of food to be emptied into the wooden trough of a pig-pen.

"Stand away thar, you fool!" Abner heard him say to the grunting pig. "Do you want me to pour it on yore back? Ef you could eat it thar you can beat me."

Abner heard the eager noise around the trough and the sucking sound of the animal, and as he hung up the harness in the wagon-shed he saw Tobias trudging back to the house, without coat or hat, swinging the empty pail at his side.

"I wish I could take life as easy as he does, Abner mused, bitterly. "I was sure that when I got to be as old as I am that I'd quit worryin'; but I'm as deep in that sort o' mire as I ever was. I don't want ter meet that good old woman, an' yet I've got to do it the best I kin."

There was a loft above the stalls where he put his horses, and Abner stood on a trough and pulled down some bun-

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dles of fodder and ears of corn through a square opening. He had closed the stall doors, and was half-way up the path, when Mary Trumbley came out of the kitchen and advanced toward him.

"I'm going down to the barn to see if I can find some fresh eggs for breakfast," she said, as she paused, facing him.

"Yes, I know what kind o' eggs you want," he thought. "Purty time o' day to look for eggs. You want to know the wust about Howard, an' couldn't wait till I got to the house. Huh! I see through you plain enough."

"I didn't see any eggs in my feed-trough," he said, aloud. "Sometimes yore hens drop 'em thar in the'r hurry to git rid of 'em."

The girl was now staring frankly into his face.

"I was wondering if you got any mail," she said, half under her breath. "I haven't heard from Cousin Hettie since her baby was born, and I was afraid one of them might be sick."

"No letters," he said, in the tone of a man who was above the subterfuge she was employing. "I got yore pa's farm paper; that's all."

He was moving toward the house now, and she turned and joined him. In perturbed silence she made several steps, then suddenly laid her hand on his arm and stopped him.

"Mrs. Tinsley has been here twice within the last hour," she said. "Uncle Ab, the poor woman is almost out of her head. She stayed as long as she possibly could. She had to go home to cook supper; she walked to the gate twenty times and looked down the road to see if you were coming. You see, she knows that if any living person can bring Howard to his senses you are the one."

"I don't see why." Abner was as nearly angry as anything could make him. "The Lord knows I didn't make the boy in parts an' stick 'im together like a clock. Young

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men are goin' to follow out the dictates of the'r own minds an' hearts. The more thar is in a young feller the harder it is to twist an' turn 'im to fit this or that pattern. They tell me Napoleon put his own wife aside to further his ends, an' some folks speak of him with respect. He got thar, anyway. Everything, no matter how black it looks at fust, seems in the end to serve a divine purpose. Mrs. Tinsley may leave that old stick-in-the-mud. In fact, that may force the old skunk to see that he ain't sech a prime favorite at the Throne—benefit number one. Mrs. Tinsley may die of a broken heart an' step into eternal joy twenty years quicker'n she expects—benefit number two. Howard may suffer a pile o' remorse over desertin' his mammy in sech a pinch, an' turn out in the end to be a kinder husband an' father—benefit number three; an' so on *ad infinitum* or *ad valorem*, I forgit which."

"Then you have failed," Mary said, with a sigh. "You failed while I was telling her that you never let go of what you undertook. I declare, Uncle Ab, I'd be ashamed to—"

"Say, Mary, let up—let up!" Abner was angry. "Ef you've got fault to find with me blame the dévil an' the Almighty. The Lord made what little good thar is in me, an' the devil stuck in the rest. You women are all right to look at an' trot on a feller's knee an' keep a house in order, but you can't reason more'n a rabbit."

"Howard ought to be ashamed of himself," Mary cried, desperately. "He may go away off and make a little money; but who could have a bit of respect for him afterward?"

"That's right, jump on him, an' I'll help you," Abner smiled, as if ashamed of his anger. "I ain't often riled, but I git hoppin' mad when I'm blamed fer what I can't keep other folks from doin'."

"Forgive me, Uncle Ab," Mary said, despondently. "I am so sorry for Mrs. Tinsley that I hardly know what

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I am saying. She will be here again before bedtime, and it is awful to think of her disappointment."

The Trumbley family were all out under the trees in front of the house after supper. The evening was not unpleasant after such a warm day, for the mountain air was cool and bracing.

"I don't blame old Tinsley much," Trumbley was drawling out, as he smoked his cob pipe with its long reed stem. "The old chap was fetched up on good sound Methodist doctrine an' is livin' up to it. I've heard folks tease 'im about Howard's views. They tell 'im—they tell the old man that the boy's articles in the paper are killin' all the influence he ever had. Bill Sebastian quit his Bible class last week—told 'im over at the mill before a crowd that he couldn't stomach all them tales about the Lord leadin' folks into bloodshed agin his own children."

"The young have always differed from the old," Abner commented, dryly. "I notice, too, mighty nigh every day that all the free thinkers amongst young folks come from them that's been overfed on dry doctrine at home."

Mary at this point rose from her chair and went to the gate and glanced down the road. Her mother, a plain, thin woman, was watching her with alert eyes.

"Whar are you goin'?" she asked, sharply.

"Nowhere. I was just looking to see if—if Mrs. Tinsley was—"

"Come here and set down," Mrs. Trumbley broke in, harshly. "You are makin' a fool o' yorese'f, an' you may as well be told so at the start."

"Tut, tut!" Abner protested. "Let the gal alone. She's jest sorry fer the old woman as I am, an' anybody else that knows the facts."

"Sorry fer her, nothin'!" Mrs. Trumbley retorted. "You are a *man*, an' she may pull the wool over *yore* eyes, but she can't fool me nor no other woman. She's been actin' silly ever since Howard decided to leave. I'm 'er

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mother, an' got 'er interests at heart. Folks will say no end o' things ef she acts this way any longer. What's so powerful wrong in Howard Tinsley goin' West? My two brothers both left home 'fore they was twenty, an' nobody died on account of it. You know what I mean, Mary, an' ef you don't go in the house an' quiet down I'll talk plainer 'n I'm talkin' now. Howard was comin' here regular till that girl from Atlanta put up at the hotel with all her finery, an' then he quit short off like he thought country girls was beneath—"

"Oh mother—mother"—Mary strode to Mrs. Trumbley's chair and stared down on her with desperate tears in her eyes and voice—"you are heartless, unkind, brutal! I—I—"

With a sob the girl turned suddenly and darted into the house.

"You ortn't to have said that," Abner declared, warmly. "Mary an' Howard have been sech good friends all this time that it ain't nothin' but natural fer 'er to hate to see him leave his ma in so much trouble."

"You are as green as a gourd, Ab Dan'el," the woman snapped, angrily. "You may know some things, but you don't know no more about women than a crawlin' baby does about arithmetic or Latin. I'm takin' it in time, that's all. I'm not goin' to have the young men fer miles around sayin' that my girl is pinin' away because one rollin' stone tumbled out o' the neighborhood. Thar's just as good fish in the sea as ever flirted their tails in the brine. What's he got, anyway? Nothin' that I kin see except the clothes he wears. He got too big fer his pants, an' Hillhouse had to git rid of 'im. As fer Mary, plenty an' plenty are after 'er. Me 'n' her was in Tarp's big store in town t'other day. He's lookin' fer a wife, an' he made a point to come wait on us hisse'f. He was as polite as a French dancin'-teacher. He pulled bolt after bolt o' cloth down an' fairly emptied a ribbon show-case to git

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out jest what she was lookin' fer to trim 'er new hat. I know when a man is in earnest, an' J. L. Tarp simply can't hide his feelin's."

"Well, ef the two are goin' to make a hitch I wish they would hurry up." Tobias's pipe gurgled as he spoke. "I'm owin' Tarp a purty stiff bill, an' ef I was his daddy-in-law he'd ax fer the money a good many times 'fore he'd see the color of it. Betwixt the two men I'd take Tarp every pop. He's a hustler from away back. I met a train o' produce-wagons clean over at the Tennessee line last Saturday, an' they was all headed fer Tarp's 'Dry-goods an' General Merchandise Emporium,' as Tarp calls his store to make it sound big. They had his handbills in the'r pockets, an' talked like they was afeard the bargains would all be gobbled up before they could git thar."

Trumbley was looking down the road, and he suddenly drawled out: "I think I see yore woman comin' now. I'm goin' in the house. I can't do no good here."

Abner glanced over the rail fence uneasily. He said nothing, but walked slowly to the gate and opened it. "Come in," he said, gently. "It is a fine evenin', ain't it, after sech a hot day?"

The visitor made no reply. She moved along to the chair Trumbley had vacated and sat down heavily. Her white apron was spotless, and yet she brushed it with her plump hands mechanically. It was as if she had already divined the news she was to receive and was trying to bear it patiently. It was for Mrs. Trumbley to break the rather awkward silence that had fallen.

"You are worryin' entirely too much about Howard, Mrs. Tinsley," she said, brusquely, and even coldly. "Young men these days ain't much good ef you tie 'em down to what they don't like. You ort to be glad he ain't wild. He will fight at the drop of a hat; shoot, cut, or do anything when he's insulted, but he's sober an' don't gamble like some, an' folks say he's got oodlins o' brains."

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Mrs. Tinsley seemed not to have heard a word of this advice. Suddenly she pushed back her sunbonnet and looked straight at Abner.

He met her stare frankly. "I had a long chat with 'im to-day," he began, "an' I put the matter before 'im as well as I could. He understands it from A to Z. He knows how hard it will be on you, still—"

"He's goin', then?" The words came out in all but a sheer burst of despair. "He's goin'!"

Abner dropped his glance to the toe of his big shoe. "I don't want you to imagine that I left a stone unturned to change 'im, Sister Tinsley. I did all that one human could do. Old age can't convince youth of a thing. It looks like the Almighty intends our best knowledge of life to come through experience an' no other way. You are havin' a hard time over this. It looks to you, I reckon, like the very sun o' life an' hope was goin' out. I wonder ef it would do you any good to face the facts—stare 'em smack dab in the eyes an' look fur, fur ahead. You think you simply can't stand to have 'im go West, but what is that compared to the sorrows that may lie ahead o' him, fine feller though he is? Why, he may—I say *may*, you understand—live to see some son o' his—the very pride of his life—laid away in death right when his hopes fer the boy was brightest. We only have to look about at the sufferin' on all sides to see that it belongs to life an' is fer some infinite purpose."

"That's all you got to tell me, then?" Mrs. Tinsley suppressed a groan, slowly rose to her feet, and turned toward the gate.

Abner rose with her and stalked along by her side. He laid a desperate hand on the latch. His kindly face was drawn with pity as he faltered: "I don't know what to say, Sister Tinsley. I'm all broke up myself. The Lord knows I want 'im to stay. I haven't lost hope entirely, either. I'm goin' to see 'im ag'in to-morrow."

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They passed through the gate together, he accompanying her a short way down the road. When he paused and was turning back she looked straight at him.

"I can't live with that man any longer if Howard goes off," she said, dejectedly. "I know my strength, an' it won't be equal to it. That's my last word."

"Shorely you wouldn't be silly enough to—" Abner checked himself. "You are too sensible a woman to—"

"I don't know what I'd do," Mrs. Tinsley blurted out, "but I wouldn't stay with Hiram Tinsley an hour afterward. I'd rather live like a wild animal in the mountains than do it." She turned suddenly and left him standing looking after her.

"Some'n' must be done," Abner reflected. "She will lose her reason ef this keeps up. Yes, some'n's got to be done. Howard would never live down the remorse of it. She may be unreasonable, but she is his mammy and is at the end o' her rope, pore thing! Ef she was my mother I'd stay by 'er—I'd stay by 'er ef all the glory of earth was offered as an inducement to leave."

CHAPTER V

THAT evening at dusk, as Howard Tinsley was passing the big parlor of the hotel on his way to his room to dress for the dance the young people had arranged in his and Miss Langham's honor, he met that young lady strolling toward the long veranda which overlooked the main street. She smiled cordially, and they walked on to the veranda together.

"It is very kind of the boys to do this, isn't it?" she said, in her soft, mellow voice. "Oh, they are so nice! I love them all. My society friends in Atlanta wonder how I can have such a good time here in the summer. You see, they want to go to New York or Atlantic City. They would die or be disgraced in their own estimation if they didn't get to those places once a year; but as for me—well, when the summer rolls around I am simply famished for old Darley."

"I think I understand the psychology of it," he smiled, a touch of vague vindictiveness in his tone.

"You think you do?" She raised her long lashes and gazed at him with a pained expression. "You are going to say something mean again, and right now when you are going away, too."

"I was only thinking of a certain fact," he said, firmly. "We needn't be afraid of facts."

"Well, what is the particular fact?" She leaned back against the balustrade and clasped her white, tapering hands before her.

"Why, you are a natural woman," he laughed. "You

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have had the admiration of men all your life. You have fed upon it as a regular diet till it has become almost the chief part of your existence. Down in Atlanta, however, your field is not quite so novel."

"My *field*?" she sniffed. "I don't like that word."

"It is all right," he laughed, teasingly. "Down there the young men are busier, as a class, and there are other girls in your set, I am sure, who like admiration, and they keep playing the game; but here there is only one of your particular kind. You have charmed this whole rural bunch, old and young, married and unmarried, and you enjoy it, that's all. You would not be true to your type if you did not enjoy it."

"Howard." She put her hand on his arm and raised her beautiful blue eyes to his. She sighed. Again the pained expression she knew so well how to use lay on her face. "Howard, do you know you are the only man who ever dared to speak to me like this? I wish I could get angry with you, but I can't."

"That's because I am sincere. I mean what I say, and you know it. I heard you say once quite frankly that fully thirty different men had proposed to you. I don't doubt it, and that fully *fifty* have been in love with you. I feel your charm myself. It fairly sweeps me off my feet at times, and I have to clutch at something. There is only one straw, and I grab it."

A flush of delight suffused her face. She was fairly off her guard. "What is that straw, pray?" she asked.

"Why, the fact that my best judgment tells me you are not for me. I simply refuse to fall into the masculine scrap-heap your dainty feet have kicked aside. You are the most delicious creature I ever met. There are moments in which I let my imagination fairly sweep me away with the fancy that we love each other, but I hold myself in check. I may not correctly estimate my strength, but I believe now that I shall never quite lose my balance."

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Her face hardened a little under sheer perplexity. "You will write to me when you get located in the West, won't you?"

"As an old friend, perhaps, yes," he answered, firmly, "but not as one of the scrap-heap. Our ways really are wide apart. I am going to try to make a living; you will continue, supported by your father's money, to break hearts to the end."

She put her hand on his arm, and they walked through the as yet unlighted corridor toward the veranda on the opposite side of the building. "Howard, you have no idea how much I like you—I think I like you more than any one I ever met. I am not sure, but I think so."

"I am sure, if you are not." His frank reply perplexed her more than ever. "You are interested in having run across one fellow, at least, who can control himself by pure reason, that's all. One little thread of common sense keeps me from being simply crazy about you. If that were cut I'd fall at your feet like all the rest. Then—" He went no further, but laughed as if to himself.

"Then what?" she demanded, curiously.

"Then you'd step on me and look for another simpleton," he said. "You see, Cora, I know what the honey of your life is made up of. It is the love and admiration of many men. If you don't stop that sort of thing before you get much older I am afraid you will be unhappy later on. There is only one hope for you, and that is that you will tire of it and settle down as some good man's wife before it is too late."

"You talk like a grandfather," she laughed, "you who are only a few years older than I am. Howard, I am going to miss you. You are different from all the rest. I'm going to be unhappy." Actual tears were rising in her eyes; her lips twitched with emotion that was almost genuine. Do you have to go away—do you really?"

"Yes, that is settled," he said. "There is no opening

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for me here. If there were I'd like to stay, because I love this country. I love it more now than ever before. I know I shall be awfully homesick at first, and lonely, but I must go."

"Wouldn't you stay for—for my sake?" she faltered. "You don't know me, Howard. What you have just said may be true—it may be partly true, but there really is another side. I know I shall love some one some day, if I don't now. See how far I am going. Howard, I have never said as much as this to any one. I am unhappy because you are going. I think of nothing else. It is on my mind constantly. Mother has noticed it, and she suspects the reason."

They had reached the veranda in the rear, and were quite alone and unobserved. Obeying a sudden impulse, he took her face between his two hands. His fine eyes were full of passion as he raised her lips toward his. Suddenly he paused, dropped his hands, and his lips grew firm, his jaw set. "I shall not kiss you," he said, bluntly. "Other men have kissed you—you admitted it once, and you had no idea how it stabbed my dream to the core. If I were to kiss you, Cora, I'd never leave you."

Suddenly she put her arms about his neck. "You've got to," she said, raising her face to his.

Firmly he caught her hands and drew them down and held them. "You are a flirt," he said, bitterly. "You don't like the word, but that is what you are. I know I could love you, body, heart, and soul, but I won't let myself do it. You are rich, while I have scarcely a dollar to my name. I haven't even a position in which to earn a bare living. Out West I shall be little better than a tramp at the start, anyway. I may have to work as a common servant for some family like yours. I have heard that you refused to marry a very wealthy man."

"Not only one, but several," she answered. "I didn't love them; they were not like you, Howard. You are

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strong, manly, and proud. You have more pride than any man I ever met."

"Let's talk of something else," he said, his face darkening, as he turned from her and stood at the balustrade.

"Why?" she asked, drawing near to him again, her appealing eyes fixed on him.

"Because it is doing neither of us a bit of good," he replied, firmly. "You would never let yourself care deeply for a man like me even if you had the inclination. All you people with money are bound down to money and all that goes with it. The poor young man who marries an heiress these days is a born fool—that is, if he meets an heiress fool enough to marry him. The woman of that sort is not born who will not sooner or later throw it in his teeth."

There was a sound of a locomotive's whistle in the distance south of the town. She was about to speak when he said:

"That's the Rome train. The boys have ordered Jim Larkin's band for to-night. Let's watch them get off. You and I ought to feel complimented. It is to cost forty dollars, railroad fare, and hotel bill besides."

"It is very, very sweet of them," she faltered, as she regarded his firm face irresolutely. "I'm sure, though, that it is more on your account than mine. They all feel sad over your leaving."

The train was coming nearer. They could hear the rumble of wheels, the clanging of a bell. Down below a negro was lighting a bonfire of fat pine saturated with kerosene, that the passengers might see their way to the hotel entrance. A red glare rose and flickered over the little brick train-shed, the freight depot adjoining, and the hill beyond the railway-tracks. Negro porters, with merry guffaws and snatches of songs, were trundling trunk-laden trucks from the steps of the hotel to the platform. Two drummers, small bags in their hands, cigars in their

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mouths, were looking back and saying good-by to Tom Sugart, who was standing in the doorway.

The puffing locomotive drew up in the shed. The porters were drumming loudly for the Johnston House. Rastus Skelton, their leader, commonly known as "Skelt," was declaiming loudly:

"Tek de main walk, gen'men, ter de palace hotel of de Souf—de Johnston House, whar you see de big sign. Only fus'-class house in de city—beds as saft as down fum a jaybird's breast, an' de bes' grub an' cookin' Souf of Mason an' Dixie line. Forty-dollar string ban' playin' while you eat, an' er nimble-toe dance in de dinin'-room after supper. Walk up, walk up!"

"I see the band," Cora said. "I must go to my room. Mother will be looking for me. You haven't asked me for a single dance, Howard. I've already promised half a dozen, and as soon as the boys begin to come in they will fill my card."

"I am not sure that I shall dance at all to-night," he said, his face averted from her own. "I don't feel a bit like it."

She moved to one side till she met his eyes. "You are a puzzle, Howard," she sighed. "But I think I understand. You are sad over going away. As the time draws near it seems harder to leave your old home and friends."

He made no denial; he was a pathetic, isolated figure in all his masculine strength, reserved force, and despondency, as he stood gazing at her. He was silent, and she touched his arm lightly.

"I shall not enjoy it a bit to-night," she said. "I shall be thinking of your going all the time."

Still he said nothing. Together they walked through the big, lamp-lit parlor to the foot of the stairs leading up to her room. Here they paused. She lifted her face to his and sighed.

"You have never said outright—in plain words—that

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you love me," she said. "You are going away, too, and I may never see you again. Just think of it—you and I may never meet again on this earth."

"I don't want you to misunderstand me," he said, finally. "I don't think I really love you, Cora. To be frank, I've fought it all along—I am fighting it now harder than ever. When I first met you I was like all the rest of your admirers, but my reason took hold of me. I simply must let you alone. If you are interested in me a little now it is due to the fact that I refuse to be your slave. Cora, you could never love me, nor any other man. It is the best thing in the world for me that I am going away."

Her face again was swept by that lovely intimation of pain. She dropped her glance to the stair she was about to ascend. Her hand on the railing, she turned away.

"You certainly know how to cut one to the quick," she said, tremulously. "You want to be as mean as possible these last days. Good-by; I'll see you to-night, I hope."

That night after the dance was over Cora went up to her room. Her mother, in the adjoining chamber, heard her, and came in and sat down. She wore a light-blue dressing-gown, and was a blonde who quite resembled her daughter in features and physique.

"I thought you all would never get through down there," she said, wearily. "I wish I could get out of the habit of lying awake till you come in. Well, did you have a good time?"

"Yes," Cora said, slowly, without looking at her mother, and beginning to take down her abundant hair.

"I don't believe it," Mrs. Langham said, firmly. "I don't believe it, because you are down in the mouth as

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you have been for the last week. What is the matter with you?"

"Nothing." Cora's tone was sharp and full of irritation. "Nothing, mother."

The older woman rose and stood at her daughter's side. "There is something wrong, and I think I know what it is. You have allowed yourself to get interested in Howard Tinsley. You know well enough that he is out of the question. You are sentimental, as I used to be; but you have too much common sense to think of marrying such a man. Still, that is all the more reason for you to imagine you care for him. Cora, I want to know one thing, and I want to know it before I go to bed."

"What is it, mother?" Cora sighed, as she met her mother's stare.

"I want to know if Howard Tinsley really is going away?"

"Yes, the day after to-morrow."

"Is it settled?"

"Absolutely."

"Has he had the cheek to ask you—have you engaged yourself to him?"

"No, mother; he has never made any proposal. We may not even correspond. He is not an ordinary man. He is different from all the rest. Oh, don't talk to me any more to-night. I'm tired. I don't know what I am saying."

"Well," Mrs. Langham replied, sharply, "I'm glad he's going. You are in a dangerous mood. I've known girls to make themselves miserable over such things. I promised your father to watch over you carefully, and here in this poky, sleepy town you are on the verge of making a goose of yourself. You are like most other girls; you want what is out of your reach. You know you can't marry that mountain boy, and for that very reason you

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think you love him. Yes, I certainly shall be glad when he is gone. Surely you will come to your senses then."

Alone before her mirror Cora finished undressing. She blew out her light and lay down on the big, cool bed before a wide-open window. "I wonder," she mused, "if I do love him? I don't know, and yet—and yet—"

CHAPTER VI

HOWARD TINSLEY waked the next morning under the heaviest depression he had ever felt. He was unable to understand why the plans which had seemed so enticing had lost their charm. He wondered now if he actually could have used his best judgment when he had so hastily decided to leave his old home. He thought of his patient, lonely old mother and the sadness he was bringing on her. He thought of his father, and now for the first time a feeling of filial tenderness crept over him. After all, the old man believed he was right, and there was something stanch and admirable in the Puritan firmness in which he was standing by his principles. Howard told himself, with a tense lump of emotion in his tight throat, that he would certainly beg the old man's pardon before he left. He had said too much in anger. A son ought to show more respect to a parent than he had done. The current of gloomy reflection bore Howard's thoughts rapidly onward. There was Mary Trumbley—gentle, patient, ever-loyal friend, whom he would not see perhaps for years. She would marry some one and pass out of his life completely. How odd it seemed to think of her marrying and bearing children. Mary was certainly different from a girl like Cora Langham, for instance. There was a quaint, old-time quality about Mary that soothed and braced him up, while Cora fired him with a passion which was as turbulent as it was hopeless.

After breakfast he sauntered out on the street and

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looked about him. Several white-hooded wagons from the mountains were standing near to the sidewalk, their owners passing from store to store with samples of produce. Clerks were sweeping out the stores and displaying their wares. It was a busy, attractive scene. With a fresh pang at heart Howard realized that there was only one other day before him and all this would be out of his life. In a group of farmers and clerks in front of Tarp's widely advertised "Emporium" he noticed a tall, brawny farmer shaking hands with everybody that passed. It was Pole Baker, who, with a valise in hand, had just alighted from the south-bound train. He had laughing brown eyes, a great shock of stiff chestnut hair, and a bushy mustache. Seeing Howard, he came to him with his bronzed hand extended cordially. "How are you, Howard, old boy?" he said. "Didn't look for me home so quick, did you—after our long talks about Texas? Here I am back on the old stompin'-ground, an' they tell me, by gum, that you are jest gettin' ready to go."

"You have come back after your wife and children, I suppose," Howard said. "Have you selected a location?"

"*Have* I?" Baker wiped his facile lips with his big hand and smiled and winked. "I was tellin' these fellers I had, to let myself down easy, but I hain't a-goin' to lie to you, Howard. Do you know what I'm a-goin' to do, my friend? I'm goin' to settle down over thar in them mountains an' eat hog an' hominy like a white man an' a free, God-fearin' citizen of America to the end o' my days. I've had my belly full o' prospectin' to try to better my condition. I've come to the conclusion that a body can't improve his condition by draggin' it across a continent. I reckon I acted sorter bull-headed. My second wife—you know her—well, she was born an' brought up in this country, an' she was agin goin' to Texas tooth an' nail. We had it up an' down—me'n-

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her did. Every night after we'd git the children in bed we'd set out in front o' the house an' jower, jower, jower. She's five year older'n I am, an' got a head like a horse. It's the longest one the Lord ever made from the chin to the little knot she wears on top, an' I begin to think it's got sense in it. She contended that Texas wasn't a bit better fer a man with a wife an' whole raft o' children than this section. Well, that went on till she finally agreed to let me go see what it was like. I had a mule an' a horse both, an' I sold the mule for enough to buy a round-trip prospector's ticket. Then I bought a new suit o' clothes—this un I got on—from Tarp in thar on a credit, an' started off."

"You remember, I saw you leave," Howard said. "I was at the depot when you checked your trunk."

"I was walkin' straight at the time, wasn't I?" Pole asked, with a smile. "I think I was sober then; but you kin bet yore life I wasn't by the time I got to Chattanooga. A feller had give me a pint o' mountain-dew ter take along—thought I might accidentally git snake-bit in that second-class car, I reckon, an' I hit it up purty lively. The brakeman come to me an' said I'd have to quit drinkin' it out o' the cup at the water-tank, for the women passengers said it smelt so strong it turned their stomachs. I was so fur gone by the time I got to Memphis that I owned the train, Pullman car an' all. They got the'r entire force together once—conductor, brakeman, and the fireman from the engine—to put me off; but some drummers and stock-drovers that I was playin' poker with promised to keep me straight, an' so I rid on so drunk I didn't know my hat from a hole in the ground. I was a purty advance-agent fer a new Western colony, wasn't I? By good luck I was half-way sober when I landed at Fort Worth. After a spree a chap usually feels mean, anyway, an' if I didn't cuss the day I was born that fust mornin' when I walked about that town nobody ever did.

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I didn't know but one feller in the place—Jack Carter, who used to live over close to Canton an' helped me make a crop one year. He was followin' the barber's trade in Fort Worth. After a lot o' trouble I finally located his shop. It was the bummiest joint you ever seed, over by the railroad round-house, where the customers was all greasy chaps as black as a pot, an' the floor was covered with hair. Jack didn't see me when I come in. He was busy choppin' the mane off a big Dutchman that run a eatin'-house next door, an' I set down agin the wall an' waited fer him to git through. I'll swear he looked like he was on the ragged edge o' nothin'. His pant-legs was all frazzled at the bottoms, an' his skin was yaller like his liver was out o' whack. Finally, when he was through an' called out 'Next!' in his low, squeaky voice, I got up an' faced 'im. He was tickled to death to see somebody from home, an' we set thar cocked up in the big chairs an' talked a long time. Lord, it was pitiful! The pore feller would lean over with his eyes fairly leakin' an' drink in every word I said about home. He declared he only had one wish left, an' that was to git up enough cash to git back here to be buried whar things was fresh an' green. He said he had a sucker in tow to buy his shop, an' if all went well he'd strike a bee-line fer Georgia. When I told 'im that I had come out lookin' fer a place to locate he stared at me like I was the prize galoot of the universe.

"I axed 'im to go take a drink with me. He said he hadn't touched a drop in several years because he couldn't afford the luxury. He knowed whar thar was a bar, an' we shet up his shop an' went to it. Well, you know me. I wanted the pore skunk to enjoy himself, an' I planked down the coin. It wasn't long before we owned the town, an', as it was ours, we painted it red. A buck nigger breshed agin me on the sidewalk, an' gi' me some back-talk. I stretched him out in the gutter, an' would 'a' been up

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fer trial in the city court, but some friendly cowboys come along an' hustled me out o' sight."

"You will really have to give up whisky, Pole," Howard advised him, gently. "The whisky you drink has been worse than deadly poison to you."

"It hain't the liquor itse'f that's wrong," Baker laughed. "The good Book says, 'It is not what goeth in a man that defileth.' You've heard yore pa read that out many a time. Well, to go on, I spread around Fort Worth till I jest had to quit. I was sick an' so nigh the jimmies that I swore some houseflies on the bar counter was turkey gobblers. I managed to git straight in a day or two, an' hired a hoss an' buggy an' drove out in the country to see what farmin' was like. I reckon I was homesick; I don't know; but everything looked uninvin'. The farmers was usin' up-to-date machinery, workin' miles an' miles o' land, an' treated you like a hobo when you stopped to talk. I told one big hulk of a feller with a Yankee brogue, who ordered me to leg it off his property, that we lynched his sort back here in God's country. I finally run across a little farmer from back here that was glad to see me. He stopped his hoss an' plow in the field an' tuck me home with 'im. As soon as we got in sight o' his house he called out to his wife, with a voice like a trumpet, that he was fetchin' home a man from Georgia, an' her an' six children of all sizes got around me, starin' as if I was a monkey in a cage. They made me put up with 'em fer the night, an' after supper we set in the parlor an' talked. To hear them a'boby would think the Lord done His level best on this state an' made a slipshod job of the balance o' the globe. The man—his name was Simpson—said he'd lie down an' die content ef he could jest take one drink from a certain spring that used to bubble up from a rock on his daddy's farm. The woman said she wanted to go to the old meetin'-house whar she used to worship—that she couldn't feel nigh

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to God amongst strangers in the new buildin' up the big road whar she said they had a' organ an' only the choir was allowed to sing. What was I to do, Howard? By gum, it didn't take me long to make up my mind! The sight o' them children finished me. I wanted to see my own so bad that I mighty nigh cried. Thar wasn't much bed-space, an' yet Simpson said he was goin' to give me a bunk to myself. I had one little feller on each knee at the time, an' I hugged 'em up tight an' axed 'em ef they wouldn't sleep with me. They fairly jumped out o' the'r hides to git into the'r night-shirts. Lord, Lord, you may say what you please, but I believe lovin' children is the holiest feelin' that ever comes to a man. When them little sweet-smellin' chaps was breathin' soft 'longside o' me I thought o' my own little ones that I'd left with jest a stepmother to look after 'em, an' swore that I'd not stay another day away from 'em. Have you seed 'em lately, Howard?"

"Not since you left," was the reply; "but they are all right, I am sure. Your wife is a good woman and takes every care of them."

"That's what I married 'er for," Pole said, quite gravely. "I'll tell you about that some day, too. Thar wasn't much honey-fugglin' in that deal, I'm here to state. But ain't I a fool tellin' you all about my trip when you are settin' out on the same experiment? Of course, I don't know anything about *yore* line, but I'm a little afraid you'll not better *yoresef*. Folks out thar in all lines o' business say Georgia is the comin' section. I know you've got plenty o' brains an' need a freer outlet fer yore ideas than old Hillhouse will give you. Have you thought about Atlanta or Birmingham? You'd be nigh home then, an' could run up once in a while—to see home folks."

"Yes, I have," Howard answered, gloomily, "but all the places are full."

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"Well, I don't want to influence you agin yore best judgment, but I think a sight of you, Howard, an' havin' you go off is like pullin' eye-teeth. Me'n' Uncle Ab both bank on you. I'd give you my last dollar ef you needed it. You've proved yorese'f a friend to me many and many a time, an' I'll be yores as long as I've strength to lift a hand. Well, so long. Old Billy Treadwell is goin' out my way in his wagon, an' is goin' to give me a lift. I see he's ready."

CHAPTER VII

WHEN Baker had left him Howard's morbid discomfiture increased. The man's account had quite completed his disillusionment over his project. His better judgment told him that he had been wrong in making such an important decision in anger, and yet he had too much pride to admit his error. He did not want to leave home now, but he saw no way out of it.

On the corner of the street he suddenly met Mary Trumbley. She flushed slightly, dropped her eyes, and then smiled sweetly.

"Early for me to get in, isn't it?" she asked. "Uncle Ab was coming and brought me along in his buggy. I have some things to buy for mother."

He took her hand and experienced a certain reluctance to releasing it. She had often comforted him in trouble, and he yearned now to open his heart to the boundless sympathy he knew she would have for him.

"I looked for you at the dance last night," he said, turning and walking along with her. "I thought you were to be there."

"Mr. Tarp asked me, but I was too tired to go," she said. "I had worked hard all day making a dress for my mother. At the last minute I sent him word not to come for me. I was completely fagged out; the ride in would have finished me. I could not have danced a step. I did not know till to-day that it was given partly in your honor, or else I should have come. I thought it was intended wholly for that Atlanta girl."

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"Whom you never liked," he smiled, significantly.

"I hardly know her." Mary averted her eyes; her tone was cold, and her pretty lips were set sensitively. "The day I dined with you at the hotel I heard her say she had no use for women—that she liked only men. I am not finding fault, but I can't get on with a girl who talks like that. She had an eye for everything I had on, and seemed to me to be sneering at my poor clothes."

"Oh, you girls, you girls!" Howard laughed. "You don't want to understand one another. Cora Langham is not a bit like that, and I've no doubt that she may misjudge you also."

"I sha'n't tell you all I think about her," Mary answered. "It would do no good, anyway, since you are going away."

"I know you think she is a flirt," Howard returned, half tentatively. "You hinted at something of the sort when she first came to Darley."

Mary shrugged her shoulders, and her lip curled slightly. "Why are we always discussing her?" she demanded, coldly. "Is there nothing else for us to talk about the day before you leave? You are coming out to see your mother before you go, aren't you, Howard?"

"Yes; oh yes," he said, with a frown, "and my father, too. I am not going to part with him in anger if I can help it."

"Oh, I'm so glad to hear you say that." Mary's eyes shone as if from rising tears. "After all, he is your father, and cannot help feeling as he does. He belongs to an earlier age than ours, Howard."

They were now at the door of Tarp's lively establishment. The young proprietor, a man of medium height and weight, was directing two clerks in arranging great stacks of dress-goods on the sidewalks. He was partly bald, wore a brown mustache, and had a merry, active air. Seeing the two friends, he greeted them smilingly,

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shaking hands with Mary with a slight touch of awkwardness.

"I cut that dance out, Miss Mary," he said. "When I got your message I kept on my working-clothes and spent the time checking off the invoice of a big shipment of notions that had just come from New York. I closed the front door and kept hard at it till after midnight. I could hear the sawing of the fiddles an' that negro calling the figures, but it didn't bother me. A live business man can't keep pace with these nimble-toed society chaps. I've got to make this thing go." He waved his hand toward the interior of the store. "I'm wakin' this sleepy old town up with modern business methods. I hold that the best field for energy is in the slow places. You see, every move you make and every ad you put out attracts attention. If I was Howard, now, I'd think twice before I quit old Darley. If I was him I'd rake up the scads an' start me a sheet of my own that would make *The Clarion* take a back seat and quit altogether."

"That's what I've often told him," Mary answered, with a timid glance at Howard; "but he has made up his mind to go."

Leaving Mary to make her purchases, Howard turned away. At the post-office he met Abner Daniel with some papers and letters in his hands. Abner touched him on the arm and drew him to one side. "Have you bought yore ticket yet?" he asked.

"No, not yet," Howard answered. "It is ready for me, though. I can get it at any moment."

Abner seemed to hesitate; he rolled his quid of tobacco between his short, yellow teeth, and said: "I want to ax you a favor, Howard. You may think it peculiar, an' I ain't quite ready to explain, but would you mind not buyin' yore ticket till I see you?"

"Ah, you are thinking of going with me; good!" the young man exclaimed, gladly.

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"No, that hain't it," Abner said. "I won't say now why I want you to wait, but will you do it? I'll see you ag'in to-day."

"Of course I will," Howard promised. "I was not going to get my ticket till to-morrow, anyway."

"All right, I'll see you after a while," Abner said, in a tone of relief, and he turned away.

CHAPTER VIII

ABNER moved along the street till he reached the corner. Here he paused and looked back almost stealthily. "I hope he won't come to the office for a few minutes, anyway," he mused. "Old Hillhouse is up thar at work, an' I must see 'im alone. The whole thing may slip up. He's so cranky he don't know his mind from one minute to the next."

Just then Abner saw Howard going down the street toward the cotton-compress and flour-mill. "Now's the time," he said, and he walked rapidly to the office of *The Clarion* and ascended the stairs. He found the editor in the main room, a crescent-shaped green shade tied above his eyes.

"Good mornin', old hoss," Abner said, lightly. "I was passin' an' thought I'd run up an' ax ef I was due you anything on my subscription. I'm a terrible hand to forget dates. I can't remember exactly when I paid you the last time."

"Sorry to say you don't owe me anything," Hillhouse answered, gloomily. "My list of delinquents is long enough, the Lord knows, but you are not on it. Did you read what I said last week about folks that won't pay for their home paper? I think I hit 'em a few swipes that they won't forget soon. The meanest type of a man on earth is the one that won't pay for a weekly paper. Folks expect you to print long accounts of their births, deaths, weddings, and descriptions of their prize pumpkins and watermelons, but jest hint to them that their subscrip-

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tion is due, and that you need the bare necessities of life, and they get hopping mad."

"I've always thought it was a powerful pore business." Abner walked to the rusty, upright stove in the center of the room, opened the door, and spat upon the rubbish it contained. "An' I've wondered often what you fellers see in the game to hold you so tight."

"I'll tell you," Hillhouse said, with frank weariness. "We get our money tied up in a plant of this sort, an' we never see a good chance to get it out. You know my daddy owned *The Clarion* before me. It was his pride. He saw it through the War—issued it in monthly instalments while we were refugeeing farther South and paper was as scarce as coffee. I hate to see the thing die a natural death, but it is certainly on the down-grade."

Abner brushed away a fly which was boring for food on his brow, and glanced about the untidy room. His eyes lighted on a big bale of white sheets of paper. "Is that what you print on?" he inquired, carelessly.

"Yes, that's our patent inside sheets," Hillhouse explained. "We get 'em fresh every week. One side is already printed, you see, and it is a sight better matter than we could set up here. There is a lot of good pictures, too, and we can't get up pictures to do any good here in the mountains. There is still another labor-saving method, and that is to buy the plate-matter by the column and saw off chunks to fill odd spaces; but that costs more than the sheets, and the sawing and fitting-in are a lot of bother. It takes a good hand to cut between two lines of type, for instance, without leaving a trace of it."

Abner's face lit up with shrewd design. "I understand something now that was a puzzle to me," he said. "I've heard lots o' folks ax why it was that the inside o' *The Clarion* always looked so clean an' neat, an' was so easy to read, while the front an' back had so many missin' letters an' mistakes generally. Moreover, when I was in

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lower Alabama last winter I was havin' you send me my paper, you remember, an' down thar I picked up *The County Record*, that had word for word the same in it that mine did. I helt 'em side by side an' compared 'em line fer line. At fust I 'lowed the editor in Alabama was stealin' yore thunder, an' started to write to you to institute suit; but the two papers had the same date, an' so I let the matter drop."

"They don't often conflict," Hillhouse said. "Now and then a subscriber gets on to it an' comes in to ask about it; but as a general thing it is a big help to an editor."

"Seems to me I heard you say you offered *The Clarion* for sale awhile back, offered to trade it fer land, or a house an' lot somers." Abner had never spoken so carelessly. He went to the stove again, this time returning without his exhausted quid.

"Yes, I ran a little notice at the head of the editorial page." Hillhouse removed the shade from his eyes and wiped his spectacles on a piece of paper. "But nobody took the trouble to write me or come in to ask my terms. At that time I had a notion that I'd like to settle down on land of my own. A man of my age doesn't want to admit that he is getting too old to do a paper full justice these rapid times, but the fact is that I am not the editor I once was by a long shot."

"Couldn't you fix it so you could have both the inside an' out of that patent process?" If Abner was jesting no hint of it occurred to Hillhouse. "It looks like it wouldn't cost a powerful lot more to git the whole business struck off at once. You see, you buy the sheets anyway, an' pay freight an' drayage on 'em. In that case you wouldn't have to pay fer type-settin' here at all, an' that must be an item."

"You don't understand, Ab. You've never run a paper, or you wouldn't ask such a question. That would never do. You see, we simply must have space left to

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fill with local matter. Our country contributors must be heard from. Some of them write mighty bright stuff; besides, folks are dying and being born, and want it recorded. Men are running for office, and are willing to pay something toward a paper's support. The young folks here in town want an organ for all their doings. Oh no, we must give at least half the paper to original matter."

"Then you need a bright young man to take the load off your shoulders. Thar is Howard Tinsley, though I hear he's off fer Texas, an' I reckon you couldn't git him."

Hillhouse frowned as he replaced his glasses and began to adjust the shade over his eyes. "I couldn't afford to pay him as much as he thinks he ought to have, and there was another big trouble. I had to cut out nearly half of what he wrote, an' he was always mad about it. His hot temper will get him down some day. I'm too old a newspaper man for a young strip like that to argue with. He has his notions and I have mine, and they are wide apart."

"It seems to me"—Abner took a piece of a tobacco plug from his pocket and began to cut off a corner with the blade of his pocket-knife—"it seems to me that the only sensible thing fer you to do, then, is to sell out an' quit. Thar's just you an' yore wife to make a livin' fer, an' surely you could do better than to stick here till you are both under ground."

Hillhouse sighed freely. "I've never wanted to get loose, Ab, as bad in all my life as I do now, but I can't manage it. I may as well tell the truth and be done with it. I reckon all married men more or less have their domestic problems; but my wife is an odd human being, if there ever was one. The trouble is, she don't think the same thing one minute that she does the next. I've worked up a scheme several times to unload this plant, and she has been with me clean along to the actual signing of the papers, and then flopped right over and swore

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she never once said she was in favor of letting go. The best deal I ever had a whack at was when a fellow from Walker County came and offered his hundred-acre farm for an even swap. She was so tickled over it that I had to hire a rig an' drive right over to look at the property. The house on it pleased her, the land was all right, an' on the way back home she was chock full of plans as to what we were going to do in the new home. She was even afraid the fellow would change his mind, and hardly slept a wink that night. The next day I told the fellow I'd swap, an' he come around with a lawyer to fix it all up. My wife was on hand, and all was smooth sailing till she happened to ask the fellow what kind of water was in the well near the kitchen. He told her it was the coldest, purest spurt of limestone that ever shot from virgin rock, an' what do you think she done? She tore up the document the lawyer had worked hard on, and said she couldn't drink limestone-water. She said folks said it gave people that drank it all kinds of trouble, and wouldn't let a cup of it go down her throat for any money. The fellow told her she wouldn't have to touch it, as there was a spring of fine freestone within two hundred yards of the house; but she shook her head. She wanted well-water, and wouldn't have no other sort."

Abner was now staring gravely, a look of genuine concern on his lined face. "So even—I say even ef you *did* get a good chance to unload, yore wife would be apt to act that way ag'in?"

"That's exactly the point I was coming to," Hillhouse said, wearily. "The truth is, things have taken a big turn in my favor. No announcement has been made in my columns of it, because I don't think it looks well for an editor to plaster his own private affairs over a sheet he's running for the public at large; but my brother Joe, who, you may know, is in the warehouse business in Augusta, made me a bang-up proposition by mail a week ago."

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"Oh, he did, eh?" Abner's eyes twinkled shrewdly. "I was down thar not long ago an' seed 'im."

"Yes; makin' money hand over fist, an' he needs a man of ability to help him out. Naturally, he thought of me. He said he would pay me a fine salary—I needn't say exactly how much—and that I'd stand a rattling good chance of working into a permanent interest, especially if I had a few hundred to invest, which I would have if I was lucky enough to sell out here for cash."

"I see." Abner crossed his long legs, swung one of his feet up and down indifferently, and scratched himself under the arm. "It is a great pity you are tied so tight, ain't it?"

"Oh, what is the use?" Hillhouse's face flared with incipient wrath. "I get so mad, Ah, at women in general, and my wife in particular, that I feel like kicking the whole thing into flinders. Why, when she first read that letter she mighty nigh had a spasm of pure joy. She run around to all the neighbors showing it and talking about what a tony town Augusta was with its telephones, street-cars, and electric light. I thought the thing surely would be all right and somebody would buy me out—in fact, two young men here in town were hoping they could raise the money, and I wrote my brother a favorable letter telling him to wait on me a few days. But what do you think happened? You might make a million guesses and not hit on it. My wife and I were on the back porch of our house. I'd run in to tell her that I thought the chances were fairly good for the young men to borrow the money to buy me out, when a thing no more important than a common hen actually interfered. She came clucking up to the step to be fed with some crumbs my wife usually threw out. She went in the dining-room—I mean my *wife* did, not the *hen*—and picked up the tablecloth and shook out some watermelon-seeds and scraps of bread and the like, and while the hen was eating it she

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said—my *wife* said—she had heard Joe's wife say that Augusta was too big a town to keep chickens in, and that she really would hate to move to a town where folks were so cramped they couldn't keep chickens. That floored me, Ab. I turned off without a word, for I knew that the very old Nick had got in her again. It happened to be chickens then, but it would be something else the next time. So, you see, that is where the matter stands."

Abner hung his head thoughtfully, a grim look of determination was settling around his kindly eyes. "I hain't never been yoked up myself," he said, "but ef I *was* I'd wear the pants. Women are too broad at the hips to look well in that kind o' garb, anyway. I never knowed a man to prosper that run to his wife for advice. Ef Adam hadn't listened to a woman an' a snake away back thar we'd all be better off. It hain't any of my business, Hillhouse, but ef you don't act for yorese'f in this matter you'll be the biggest fool the sun ever shed light on."

"Do you think so, Ab?" Hillhouse rose with something like buoyancy in his mien, and strode back and forth across the room.

"I don't think nothin' about it; I *know* it. What you ort to do is to sell out whether she's willin' or not. Then I'd advise you to offer 'er bed an' board in Augusta, an' tell 'er she was welcome to go or stay."

"I believe you are right, I do; on my soul I do. She would raise a powerful rumpus, but she might come around in time. Ab, I want to go down there with Joe worse than anything I ever wanted in my life. You've given me courage this morning. I believe I'll simply go ahead and see those young men to-day, and—"

"Who are they, ef thar ain't no harm in axin'?" Abner broke in.

"Why, it's Alf Lowry and Pete Sebastian," Hillhouse responded, cautiously.

"Oh, *them* fellers!" Abner sniffed, contemptuously.

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"Why do you say that, Ab?" Hillhouse paused in his walk and bent down anxiously.

"Because they was tryin' to borrow money from me," Abner replied. "They wouldn't say what it was fer. They'd been all around everywhere, even to one pore old widow close to my farm. The trouble is they hain't no security to offer, an' the'r own daddies wouldn't sign a note. They are too wild an' harum-scarum to make a thing like this go. They would git drunk an' scatter the type from here to Springtown an' back."

"I was afraid there would be a hitch somewhere." Hillhouse showed his despair in his face. "It is just like my luck—nothing seems to come my way."

"How much did you offer 'em the plant fer?" Abner went to the stove again, opened the loose-hinged door, spat, and carefully closed it. "Why don't you strike a match to this stuff some wet day an' burn up all this rubbish? It is powerful dirty. How much did you say you was axin'?"

"Fifteen hundred even," Hillhouse sighed.

Abner returned to his chair; he tilted it back on its two rear legs, and chewed his quid. "It is a big price," he said. "You need new presses of up-to-date make, an' more type an' fixtures generally. It would take another thousand to put it in runnin' order. Say, Hillhouse, thar ain't no use beatin' the devil around a bush till it is plumb dug up by the roots. I don't tell all my business to anybody, but I've had a notion o' buyin' a paper *myself*."

"You have?" The editor was genuinely surprised.

"Yes, an', while I can't be positive, I want to know here and now, man to man—no woman to be consulted—ef I'll plank down fifteen hundred dollars in cold cash by three o'clock to-day may I have the plant?"

Hillhouse flushed with eagerness, and then his face became rigid, his lips shook.

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"I was wondering what my wife—"

"Hold, hold!" Abner rose and turned toward the door. "We've talked enough about women for one day. I ain't makin' no proposition to no woman, nor to no man tied to one's apron-strings, or corset-laces, nuther, for that matter. You tell me, Hillhouse, man to man, whether it is a deal or not."

Hillhouse was quite pale by this time. He walked to a window and looked out on the street. Abner, from the corner of a watchful eye, saw his shoulders rise convulsively. The next moment the editor faced him.

"I'll take you up," he said, grimly. "I'll give you till three o'clock to close the thing. I'm going to Augusta. She can stay here if she wants to, but I'm going."

"That's the talk!" Abner shook hands with him. "I wouldn't buy you out ef it wasn't for yore good, an' her'n, too. Let me have a pen and a sheet o' paper, will you?"

Hillhouse got the things, and Abner moved his chair to a table and wrote, his hand cramped, his eyes close to the writing. He dipped his pen often, now and then driving the sharp point into the unglazed paper. Suddenly he looked up and smiled sheepishly. "I'm a purty fair speller. I used to git to the head o' the class nine times out o' ten at a spellin'-bee, an' stay thar, to boot; but thar was one word that I never could tell whether it was spelt with *ie* or *ei*—the word is received."

Hillhouse, who was quite nervous and excited, told him the correct form, and Abner finished writing. He went to the stove, pulled out the drawer below the grate, and sifted a handful of ashes over the wet ink, and then, shaking the paper well, he extended it to the editor; and as he did so he took out a long leather pocket-book and extracted a ten-dollar bill, which he laid on the table. Hillhouse glanced at the writing and then at the money.

"What is this?" he asked, nervously.

"It's just a receipt for ten dollars," Abner answered.

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"I'm a great hand to pass money in any deal. It sort o' clinches a thing, you know. Sign that, an' I'll go out an' fetch in the rest o' the spondoolix."

"But you said you wanted till three o'clock," Hillhouse stammered, irresolution stamped on his whole being.

"Oh yes, that was only a matter o' form. I can git back quicker than that. I've just got to go to the bank. This ten makes you safe, you see. Ef I was mean enough to back down you could hold me by law. When you git with Joe down thar in that crackin' good business you will learn more about sech things. Newspaper editors always seemed to me to be more or less like children. Ef you had been in any other line, Hillhouse, yore wife wouldn't have sech a tight clamp on yore nose, an' twist it so often."

"Very well." Hillhouse breathed out a sigh. "Go ahead, Ab; the die is cast. I'll be my own boss this time, if she sues me for a divorce."

CHAPTER IX

AS Abner was passing Tarp's store a few minutes later he met Mary just coming out.

"Hello!" he said, jovially. "Have you finished up already? I 'lowed the proprietor would hash up some pretext or other to keep you in thar till dinner-time. Tarp's got a long head on 'im; he knows it will help his courtin' along for you to see 'im directin' all them busy clerks. Say, Mary, I don't want to make you jealous, but I see Tarp has got a couple o' powerful nice-lookin' gals helpin' 'im out. That slim un that keeps his books fer 'im takes the rag off the bush. She looks mighty cute with them straw cuffs on an' 'er little shiny heels cocked up on a rung o' that high stool. The sight o' her hat hangin' above his desk might make Tarp think it would look better hangin' up in his house. I don't know. It is wonderful how much cooler a female looks in a business office than she kin over a wash-tub or cookin'-stove. Now, a man looks about as well in one place as another, an' that ort to argue in favor of the sexes swappin' jobs."

Mary eyed him curiously, as the two turned down the street toward the bank. "What is the matter with you?" she asked. "Coming into town, you said so many nice things about Howard; you almost cried, and here you are joking about everything. Have you forgotten that the poor boy is going away to-morrow?"

Abner smiled slyly and averted his face toward the street, that she might not observe its expression.

"Howard is all right," he said. "He'd make a bang-

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up editor of a paper, wouldn't he? He'd rise like a kite ef he had better wind under 'im than he has now, wouldn't he?"

"But he'll be homesick, so far off among strangers," Mary sighed, gloomily. "That will take all energy and courage out of him. He loves it here. He has often told me that he'd rather live in Darley than in any other place in the world. He is being driven away from here, Uncle Ab, by his father, by that contemptible Hillhouse, and now you"—Mary's voice shook, and her pretty chin quivered—"even *you* are joining in. Just think of what a true friend you are losing. Why, I've heard Howard say he loved you—actually *loved* you—that he'd rather sit and talk with you or go hunting or fishing with you than any other friend in the world, and here you are making all sorts of silly jokes the day before he— Why, I feel—I—I feel as if something awful were happening to him."

Abner turned a glowing face on her grief-swept one. "So he actually likes old Ab, does he? Well, maybe I don't love him. I'd give up my last dollar to 'im, an' that ort to be a proof. Whar is he?"

"He was in Tarp's store looking at a trunk a few minutes ago," Mary said. "He wanted my advice about it, but I'd as soon have helped him select his coffin. There he is now crossing the street." Mary was waving her sunshade at Howard, and she and Abner paused to wait for him.

"He didn't buy that trunk, did he?" Abner asked, anxiously.

"No, he said he'd look at it again later."

"He don't need no trunk." Abner smiled mysteriously. "A tramp like him ort to carry his things in a handkerchief on a stick over his shoulder. That feller may have to count a good many cross-ties betwixt Texas an' these mountains—that is, ef he ever comes back."

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"You are absolutely heartless," Mary retorted, in sheer exasperation. "I don't know what is the matter with you to-day. You talk and act like a child expecting Santa Claus. If you don't think of yourself you ought to think of his poor old mother and—and—others."

"That's right, claw me, Miss Cat." Abner laughed even more merrily than ever. He turned to greet Howard, who, with a colorless face and despondent walk, now met them.

"I want to talk with both of you," Abner said. "In the fust place, you are going to eat dinner at the hotel with me at twelve o'clock sharp. Come on an' let's go up to the parlor an' git out o' this roastin' sun."

Neither of the two offered any protest, and in a few minutes they were seated in the big, cool reception-room, with its high windows, lace curtains, marble-topped center-table, square rosewood piano, and chairs and sofa upholstered in satin.

"Now, let's all git down to business," Abner said, for the first time betraying a certain awkwardness. "Howard, I want to tell you something. You an' Mary both may have noticed that I always loved to write occasional things from out our way to *The Clarion*. I don't know, but it was the finest amusement I ever had. Seein' yore own ideas in print somehow is like hearin' yorese'f orate when you are in yore best trim an' everybody else is quiet. So, while I never talked it even to friends, I have always thought I'd like to own a newspaper. I reckon I'd have had one before this, but I was afeard I couldn't run the whole shebang by myself. However, all yore talk, Howard, about goin' off kept simmerin' in my mind till I got newspaper so much in my head that I had to take action. Now, you may think me a fool, but I've gone an' bought a paper—at least, I've made a payment on one an' the deal is as good as closed. Now, what do you think? This is

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the way the matter stands. I'll make a born idiot o' myself ef I can't git a young man o' brains to run the thing fer me. I've bought what's left of *The Clarion*, an' ef you'll cut out this trip o' yore'n to the wild and woolly West and lay hold here with me you will do me a big favor."

The young couple stared incredulously. "Are you in earnest?" Howard asked; and Mary leaned forward, a blaze of understanding kindling in her eyes and face.

"Yes, I'm in earnest, and you've got to stick to me, my boy. You can make this thing fairly hum. You may have full swing. I'll trust it all to yore judgment. We'll agree on the terms. All I'd expect would be a moderate rate of interest for the money invested, and you may have the rest."

Mary's eyes were full of tears. She started to speak, but choked up. Howard was deeply moved. "I'm not worthy of it, Uncle Ab. Of all things it is what I'd like best, but I ought not to let you—"

"Cut all that out," Abner said, firmly. "You will not only give *The Clarion* new life, but between us we can build this town up. The place is in prime condition to git a boom on herself. She lies fine here at the meetin'-point o' two railroads, an' the new one that's talked of may be induced to head this way. A month from now Hillhouse won't know *The New Clarion* from a side o' sole leather. Patent plate matter must go to the scrap-heap; every line in our paper must be about home an' set up an' printed at home. Now you two talk it over while I run down to the wash-room an' git the dust out o' my whiskers."

"Oh, isn't he good?" Mary all but sobbed, when she and Howard were alone. "Howard, your mother will be the happiest woman in the world when she hears the news."

"It is a great opportunity," the young man answered,

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"and I'm going to do my best to prove myself worthy of Uncle Ab's confidence."

A step was heard in the corridor outside, and Cora Langham and her mother came in. Howard rose to greet them, while Mary stared steadily out through the open door.

CHAPTER X

IMMEDIATELY after dinner Abner went to the bank and thence down to the office of *The Clarion*. He found Hillhouse in the main room seated at his desk. He had a nervous manner, and his eyes shone despondently as they fell to the floor. A thing which had an ominous look to Abner was the ten-dollar bill still lying on the table where he had left it. Abner bent over it without touching it, a resentful expression on his face.

"What's this—Confederate money?" he half laughed. "At first sight I tuck it fer the greenback I laid thar to clinch our trade. Ef it is genuine I'd put it in my hip-pocket or weight it down with some'n' or other. A little puff o' wind might send it flyin' clean out into the wagon-yard amongst them blind-tiger fellers, who wouldn't tarry long afterward."

"I don't want your money, Ab," Hillhouse whined, his eyes still on the floor.

"You say you don't? Well, that's a good trait in you, Hillhouse. Most folks in these days o' graft will take any money they kin lay hands on, but, as you own *this* bill, you needn't have any scruples. In fact, I've just come in to hand you a lot more. Here is fourteen hundred and ninety, as crisp as dry leaves round a camp-fire."

Abner took out a flat package of bills and extended them across the desk under the editor's green eye-shade. But with a sigh of appeal Hillhouse averted his face. "I know I'm actin' like a baby," he all but whimpered.

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"I know my own mind, Ab; but I've lived with a wishy-washy woman so long that I'm a slave to her whims. I want to sell out. I want to go in with Joe, because it is the best chance I ever had, but my wife—"

"Your wife?" Abner said, contemptuously. "I thought she was clean out of it. So you told 'er, did you?"

"No, I didn't," Hillhouse said, desperately. "After you left I went home to tell 'er, but I just couldn't do it. I found her amongst her flowers in the front yard. You know she's a great hand to cultivate fine roses. When I got to the gate she called my attention to a big yellow bush and said it would draw a prize in any show in the country. I let her talk a few minutes, then all at once she up and asked me if I had seen the fellows that was trying to get up the money to buy *The Clarion*. I told her I hadn't and asked her why she wanted to know.

"'Because,' said she, 'they are a pretty pair of fools if they think I'd sell out *my* paper and move away from such a beautiful flower garden as this. They tell me that roses like these simply won't take root as far south as Augusta, and that the houses of the city set so close together that each resident hasn't an inch of space to plant even a hill of beans.'

"Well, there it rests," Hillhouse labored and was delivered of a deep groan. "If I had told her about our talk—that I'd listened to your proposition with any notion of taking it up—well, she would have clawed my eyes out on the spot. I know the woman, Ab, and you don't. You never have lived with her."

"No, thank God—I mean, Hillhouse," Abner corrected, quickly, "that she hain't treatin' you half decent. You are the boss, or ort to be. Scriptur' somers lays down powerful strict laws agin women takin' a hand in what ort to be run by the head o' the family. Now, the trade is made betwixt us, an' thar ain't no way out of it on my part fer reasons I won't go into. The receipt I hold over

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yore name is as bindin' as any document that could be drawn up in any law-office in the state."

"You say it is?" Hillhouse's face was full of yearning indecision.

"Yes, *The Clarion* is mine, an' you are lucky to git rid of it. Now, listen to me. You say you've lived with yore wife an' I hain't. That's all so, but I'll bet a hoss to a gingercake that I know 'er better'n you do. Now, I'll tell you what you will have to do. You'll have to work her so fine that she will think *she* is sellin' the paper. She's been boss so long that whenever you take a hand she gits her dander up and squares herself agin it. That is at the bottom o' the whole thing."

"That may be a good idea, but I can't do it," Hillhouse answered. "I know that everything that does happen is what she proposes. I can't recall a single thing that I ever mentioned that went through, while everything she hints at somehow goes right off the reel."

"Well, then, I'll have to help you out," Abner said, with firmness. "I hain't paid fer the work, but simply out o' pity fer you as a sufferin' man that I've knowed an' liked a long time I'll take it in hand. Let me git 'at 'er. Is she at home now?"

"Yes"—Hillhouse raised a pair of doubtful eyes—"you'll find her in the front yard where I left her a minute ago. But, Ab, I want you to be careful. When she is opposed she sometimes has hysterics so bad that a doctor has to come. The last time I called in Dr. Stone he got mad at her for the way she went on. He told me that hysterics wasn't no actual disease, but was just imagination and the way some women have of letting off steam. He came powerful near saying that it was what was meant by the evil spirits our Saviour used to cast out. She was lying there to all appearances unable to talk and making signs when he come in.

"He took one look at her and sniffed. He called me

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out of the room and said: 'She can talk as well as anybody. Nothing is the matter with her. I can't charge for visits like these, and I don't want to be called away from important cases when I don't do some good. Now just get me a glass half full of cold water. Watch me close, and the next time she acts this way you administer the same treatment.'

"I thought he was going to give her a dose of some soothing mixture, for he had his saddle-bags with him; but I was mistaken. When I brought the water he hid the tumbler behind him, and went in and stood over her. Then he asked her to sit up straight, and she did, he still keeping the tumbler out of sight. She hadn't more than reached an upright position when he dashed the water smack dab in her face. Oh, wasn't she mad? She hopped out of bed and told him if he ever darkened that door again she would have the law on him.

"'Well, I have cured you, haven't I?' Doc grinned. 'And I am not going to charge for it.' And with that he left her mopping her face with a towel, madder than any wet hen you ever saw."

"I'll bet you never used the treatment," Abner commented, dryly. "You hain't got backbone enough."

"No, I never did, to tell the truth," Hillhouse responded. "The treatment is simple an' cheap, and it worked like a charm in my wife's case; but a doctor is a privileged character. No, if you are going to talk to her, Ab, you must keep your wits about you. I hope you will accomplish something, but I don't feel at all sure about it. My wife is a strong-willed woman, and she has had her way a good many years."

CHAPTER XI

IN the front yard of a simple cottage near by, Daniel saw the object of his visit. She was a tall, thin woman, with blue eyes, sparse chestnut hair, and almost bloodless skin. She stood up, a garden trowel in hand, a short piece of twine between her drawn lips, as Abner leaned on the gate.

"Good mornin', Sister Hillhouse," he smiled. "Don't let me stop you at yore work. I was just passin'. I was in at *The Clarion* just now. Yore husband says you run the house, an' I 'lowed I'd ax you ef you'd like to buy some o' my prime smoke-cured hams."

"We don't need any," she answered, cordially. "We have been using sugar-cured hams from Chicago. The merchants here advertise with us, you know, and we feel that we ought to deal with them."

"Biggest mistake you ever made." Abner unlatched the small gate and went in, ostensibly to examine and smell a certain rose. "You ort to know, Sister Hillhouse, that our old-fashioned smoke-house meat is miles an' miles ahead o' the quick-cured stuff that is shipped by the car-load from the West. Why, you ort to be out our way an' see how we do it. We hang the upper part o' the smoke-house full o' hams, shoulders, sides, spiced an' peppered sausage, in clean inside corn-shucks, an' then we make a fire in the center out o' seasoned hickory wood an' chips as dry as powder. We close the house tight an' keep the fire goin' fer days an' days. A Chicago meat drummer stopped one day to see the process, an' he told

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me that his stuff was jest smoked barely enough to stain the outside a little tiny bit. He said that ef Western meat was smoked as thoroughly as mine that you folks would have to pay a dollar a pound for it. You see, wood ain't no object to us out our way, whar we are constantly clearin' up new ground, an' as fer the bother o' keepin' the fire goin', a child could attend to it, though a body has to make quick runs in an' out, holdin' the breath, to put chips on. I declare I'd rather see the smoke oozin' out betwixt the shingles of a smoke-house than any sight I ever looked at."

"I know your hams must be delicious, but—"

"They are as sweet as sugar on the tongue." Abner went closer to the porch as he interrupted her. Two chairs in the shade behind the honeysuckle vines looked inviting.

"Take a seat and rest, Mr. Daniel," Mrs. Hillhouse now bethought herself to say, and as he accepted and doffed his hat, she went on: "About the hams. Old-fashioned eatables do seem to be passing out of use. Folks buy so many fancy things put up in cans here lately. I'll think over your meat and let you know. I noticed in *The Clarion* not long ago that you took a trip away. Where did you go?" She had seated herself by him, and was divesting her thin hands of the cotton gloves she wore while doing garden work.

"Oh, I went everywhar, it seems to me"—he was laying his hat carefully on the floor at his side—"North, West, an' South—stopped quite a while in Augusta. By the way, that's a *pretty* town, Sister Hillhouse—got the widest, shadiest avenues you ever laid eyes on. The big, fine houses set away back on wide lawns as green an' level as a billiard-table, with grass clipped as close as a convict's hair; an' roses! Oh, my! Joe Hillhouse's wife, Jane, yore sister-in-law, has oceans of 'em both summer an' winter. I used to go to school with Joe over in Gilmer,

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an' he made me put up overnight at his new mansion. I felt a little like a yahoo at that fine table with all them glitterin' dishes an' silver contraptions. Jane is a wonderful up-to-date woman, jest the wife fer a risin' man like Joe."

"I never thought she was anything extra," Mrs. Hillhouse said, frigidly; "not in education, anyway. She never had half as many advantages as a girl that I had. Her pa was just a poor circuit rider, while my father owned the finest river-bottom plantation that—"

"Jane's makin' up for lost time, I reckon." Abner seemed unconscious of the fact that he was interrupting her. "Up here in this God-forsaken section she had no sort o' show fer her natural talents, but down thar in that swift town she is feelin' 'er oats. It is a pretty sight to see Jane in a fluffy yaller-silk dress cut low at the neck an' her arms white an' plump at the head o' that scrumptious table orderin' them nigger gals to tote forward this an' that toothsome dish. Joe's makin' money like a dam broke loose—he's got a big growin' business, an' he spends freely."

"Yes, he's doing well," Mrs. Hillhouse declared, with animation that crept from her flushed cheeks to her eyes. "He wants a partner, too. He has written John to come down an' take an interest. Joe says we needn't have any rent to pay, that there is plenty of room for us all in his big house. Yes, he's crazy to have us come."

"You don't tell me!" Abner exclaimed, in well-assumed astonishment. "An' what a pity, too, fer John certainly is tied here hands an' feet. Unloadin' a piece o' property like a newspaper on its last legs ain't no little undertakin', I'm here to state."

"We'd have no trouble at all," Mrs. Hillhouse answered. "In fact, two young men here in Darley are now borrowing the money with the hope that we will decide to sell."

"Oh, *them* fellers!" Abner said, in a tone of sym-

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pathetic dismay. "Well, if your sole hope lies in that direction I'm sorry to say you will meet with disappointment. They came to me after bein' turned down everywhere else. I couldn't lend money to crack-brains like them, an' told 'em so."

Mrs. Hillhouse's features fell into anxious gravity. It was as if she could think of nothing to say at the moment.

"It is that way all through, Sister Hillhouse," Abner said, consolingly, as he took up his hat and fitted it over his knee. "Thar is always some wall or other risin' betwixt us an' the plums o' life—that is fer *some* of us—you an' me an' John, for instance; but Jane an' Joe have drifted at high tide into a patch o' clover—especially Jane. If yore husband jest *could* git in with his brother down thar now you'd eclipse Jane mighty soon, fer *you* know what's what. You are dyin' of the dry-rot in this measly old town whar every neighbor knows when yore house-cat catches a rat, an' what you et fer breakfast yorese'f."

"You say those young men can't get up the money?" the woman faltered. "Why, I thought there was no doubt about that."

"No, they can't make the riffle," said Abner, colloquially, "but you must pay Jane a visit, anyway. She'd be glad to see you, I know, fer she was me, an' I'm nothin' but a scrub. You ort to see her chicken-house. It is in a great lot fenced off with wire nettin'. Her fine hens lay eggs that fetch a dollar a dozen for hatchin' purposes. It's a pretty sight. The water is good in Augusta, too—fine pure freestone, as soft to wash with as rain-water full o' sal-soda. What a life you are missin', Sister Hillhouse! You could do like Jane says she is goin' to do—spend the winter thar when all the New York millionaires are at the hotels playin' golf, an' the warm months here fer a change. It makes me mad to think o' what a little thing is standin' betwixt you an' all them advantages, but it is the little things that stump us an' tie the halter

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of failure round our necks. I guess John Hillhouse will hang onto that patent inside sheet till the subscribers bury 'im at th'r expense out o' gratitude fer the many obituaries he has printed about th'r kin. I don't know, I'm shore."

Mrs. Hillhouse's sallow face was filled with determination.

"I'm going to sell the paper," she said. "John makes a botch of everything he attempts. He tried a while back to get me to consent to trade *The Clarion* for a farm miles and miles from civilization. If I had consented we'd be further from Augusta than we are now. Surely there are persons who will pay fifteen hundred dollars for a paper like that, and I'm going to find them if I have to run an advertisement in outside papers."

"Thar is *one* thing that would help you." Abner had the air of a paid legal adviser. "You certainly could give the buyer good reasons for you sellin' out, an' that would be an item. Just explain the offer Joe Hillhouse is makin', an' all doubts would be laid. Yes, I agree with you, Sister Hillhouse, if the paper is sold *you'll* have to do it. John never could do it in this world—or the next, as fer that matter."

"I'm going to *sell*," the woman said. "I've never failed yet in anything I set out to accomplish. Jane Hillhouse may think I'll spend the rest o' my days in this poky town, but she will know differently very soon."

Abner rose to take his departure. As he stepped down to the ground he swung his hat idly at his side. "It is funny, but all this talk about sellin' *The Clarion* makes me think that I had a notion o' ownin' a weekly myse'f. I think a sight o' Howard Tinsley, an' he's about to go away off som'er's to embark in newspaper work. I've got fifteen hundred dollars lyin' idle, too. I'd never have dreamt o' tradin' with yore husband. Like many men, he don't seem to know his own mind long at a time. Of course, if I *was* to buy I'd want to deal straight out with you."

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The woman was flushed with combined eagerness and anxiety.

"I'll let you have it," she said. "John will do exactly what I say. He always does."

Abner turned toward the gate, putting his hat on to shade his face from the sun. "Thar is a paper that could be bought over in Gilmer County. I hain't been to look it over yet, an'—"

"But that would take you and Howard both away from home," urged the woman, shrewdly. "Surely you'd rather have a paper here at Darley."

"Well, thar *is* somethin' in that, too." Abner's entire being wore the vestments of a man being led unwittingly by a superior influence. "An' it tuck a woman to think of it, too."

"Well, what do you say?" Mrs. Hillhouse followed him to the gate, which he was closing after him. "You will take it, won't you?"

"I'll swear," Abner said, sheepishly. "You certainly know how to wheedle a feller. Shorely you kin wait till I take a trip over to Gilmer to look that plant over?"

"It is now or never with me," was the firm answer. "I want to go in the house and write to Jane Hillhouse, and I want to say positively that we are coming. That woman sha'n't crow over me another minute, Mr. Daniel. What is she, anyway? She is spoilt to death by all that down there. What do you say, Mr. Daniel? You will not make a mistake in buying my paper."

"Well, I reckon I'll have to give in," Abner actually faltered. "You women, you women! You *will* have yore way. Well, go in an' write to Jane. I'll see my lawyer right away, an' will fetch you the money an' a paper to sign. I see I'm in fer it. Gee-whilikins! Here I am tryin' to sell a few hams, an' lettin' go o' fifteen hundred round plunks o' cash fer a business I don't know any more about 'an a rabbit."

CHAPTER XII

IT was after dark when Abner and Mary reached home. Mrs. Trumbley was waiting on the porch, anxious to see the purchases her daughter had made for her.

"What under the sun kept you so long?" she asked, pettishly. "I've been to the door forty times and looked down the road—done yore work an' mine both. Now, I'll have to wait till sun-up to see how you matched the cloth."

With much elation Mary gave an explanation of the important deal Abner had made. "Howard won't go now, mother. Think of that."

"Howard, Howard, Howard!" Mrs. Trumbley sniffed, contemptuously. "To hear you all chatter, a'body would conclude that the whole round world was turnin' fer that boy an' nothin' else. I hope you didn't make a fool o' yoreself before Jim Tarp. A man with his solid business head ain't agoin' to visit a girl with serious intentions that is daft about a rollin'-stone like Howard Tinsley."

"So old Ab had fifteen hundred cash, did he?" Tobias Trumbley drawled out, as he leaned in the doorway to catch the conversation, his coarse shirt open at the neck. "I knowed the old duck had scads laid by fer a rainy day, but I hardly 'lowed the pile was as big as that. He won't lose, nuther. Them two 'll make that paper walk along, you see ef they don't."

With the parcels unopened under her arm, Mrs. Trumbley was turning toward the dining-room. "Come on an' eat yore supper," she said to her daughter. "I hear

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Mr. Daniel on the porch now. Take off that hat. Have you gone plumb crazy?"

Mary stood hesitatingly. "I'm not hungry, mother—not a bit. Howard treated me and Uncle Ab to ice-cream and cakes just before we drove out of town. He was so happy over the trade being closed that he insisted on our doing it, and—"

"Well, you ain't goin' to sleep in yore hat, shorely?" Mrs. Trumbley retorted, sharply. "What are you keepin' it on for?"

With slow fingers Mary untied the ribbons beneath her irresolute chin. "I thought I'd keep it on because I have to—to run over to the Tinsleys, but I won't need it now that it is dark."

"*Over to Tinsley's!* Did you ever?" exclaimed Mrs. Trumbley. "What in the name o' common sense are you goin' over thar fer? You talked with that old woman at the gate fully an hour this mornin', an' now you have to see 'er before you are at home a minute. You will be sleepin' an' eatin' over thar next, I reckon."

"Tut, tut, tut!" The exclamation was Abner's, who was entering from the rear, his loose shoes scraping on the floor. "Do let the gal alone. I heard 'er promise Howard to run right over to relieve his mother's mind. The pore old creature is nigh crazy, expectin' the boy to go away to-morrow, an' this change in his plans will be glad tidin's. Go ahead, Mary. Old Ab understands you, ef yore ma don't."

"I understand 'er entirely too well fer *my* peace o' mind," Mrs. Trumbley sneered. "She is lettin' the entire country know she has Howard Tinsley on her mind—right now, too, when the triffin' scamp is drivin' here an' thar with that stuck-up Atlanta girl. I heard—an' it come straight, too—that him an' her met old Tinsley in the big road t'other day, an' that Howard turned his head

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in another direction an' didn't so much as nod to the man he owes his all to."

"Howard looked away to keep from havin' to stop an' lick the old skunk in public," Abner chuckled, mischievously. "Old Hiram has been shootin' off his lip too free about Miss Langham. He thinks because she shakes a merry toe in the gay quadrille, an' lets the boys hold 'er tight agin 'em in the polka, that she is leadin' 'em all straight to perdition. She ain't exactly the sour-faced sort of females I was fetched up with; but I kind o' like 'er fer a change. I don't believe Howard is ashamed o' his daddy—the boy ain't that sort by a long shot; but he's havin' a hard time gittin' along with the old chap. Mary, go ahead—let the boy's ma know what's happened. If you don't go I will have to, an' I want to avoid Hiram. I know 'im well enough to know that he's goin' to git his back up over what I've done."

In high impatience Mrs. Trumbley turned aside to open the parcels, and Mary glided out into the twilight, her anticipated joy greatly diminished by the reprimand she had received.

She found Mrs. Tinsley alone in the big kitchen, which was dimly lighted by an oil-lamp on a table. Mary's step was soft, and the woman was not aware of her presence till she was close behind her. Mary overheard a low, suppressed sigh as Mrs. Tinsley bent over the open fire, on the coals of which were some pots and pans which she was cleaning with hot water and a rag on a stick.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, as she turned and saw the visitor. "I didn't know who it was. Have you just got back? I was going over to—to see you. I—I thought Howard surely would come back with you, and be at *your* house if—if he didn't come on here. Is—is he thar?"

"No, we left him in town." Mary's voice was full of tense emotion. She laid her hands tenderly on the bent shoulders. The fear flashed through her mind that the

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good news might do the recipient serious harm, and she was wondering how she could best make it known. In the short pause that ensued a groan escaped Mrs. Tinsley's lips.

"I see; I see; he's not comin' even to say good-by to me. Maybe he'd rather I'd not go in town to see 'im off, either? It may be true, as some say, that the young can't feel partin' like the old do. He's all I got in the world, but maybe I don't count fer much with him, as good a boy as he's always been."

Mary caught the hardened palms in her own; she drew the old woman to her in a firm embrace. "Are you prepared for *real good* news, Mrs. Tinsley?" she asked, tenderly. "You see, I am afraid—"

"Good—good news?" Mrs. Tinsley held her breath, her eyes widening as they fixed themselves on Mary's.

"Yes, the best news in the world, Mrs. Tinsley. Howard is not going away at all. He would have come to tell you himself, but he had some important work to do to-night, and left it to me."

Mrs. Tinsley, staring almost incredulously, put her hand behind her, feeling about till it touched a chair. Then she sat down, her eyes still devouring Mary's. Drawing up another chair, and holding Mrs. Tinsley's hand, Mary told all that had happened through the day.

As she talked in her gentle way, the girl saw the strong features melt into softness and take on a spiritual light more wonderful than she had ever before beheld. Mrs. Tinsley put her hand over her quivering lips and choked down a welling sob.

"The Lord's answered my prayer," she faltered out. "This mornin' after you left, Mary, I went down in the big swamp. I kept goin' until I was out o' hearin' of any sounds but the birds, the frogs, an' the bees. Then I got down on my knees right whar the mire was shoe-mouth deep. Somehow I thought a place like that was

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better'n a comfortable one. I throwed myself flat on the wet moss, dug my hands into it, and cried out to my Maker with what seemed to me to be my last breath. I told 'Im to look at me an' point out any thing that I had done of harm to any livin' creature, even a dumb brute, or to Him, an' see if He hadn't overlooked my case too long. I prayed an' prayed like that fer hours on a stretch without stoppin'. Then, all at once, some'n' seemed to whisper inside o' me. 'Go home,' it said, 'an' wait.'"

"Strange, strange," Mary whispered. "I've prayed, too—that all your trouble might be averted. I was los-ing faith when the good news fell like a bolt from a clear sky. Howard is going to make up with his father, too. He told me that he was going to beg Mr. Tinsley's pardon for his hasty words when he was so angry on the day he left home."

"He sha'n't do it—my boy sha'n't lower himself!" burst from Mrs. Tinsley's tight throat. "Howard hain't done wrong. Ef he was such a fool as to believe all his pa tries to pound into 'im I'd not respect 'im a bit. I want 'im just like he is. Would a man like Abner Daniel put money behind him ef he was like Hiram? Not much, he wouldn't, in this day of progress an' enlightenment. All Hiram's cold-blooded ideas about the Bible make a regular fiend o' me; but when Howard explains it in *his* way I know he is right, an' feel uplifted."

CHAPTER XIII

HALF an hour later Mary gently kissed her friend and started home. At the gate she met Hiram, who was just coming in. She hesitated, and then with no little embarrassment told him the news.

"Humph!" Hiram sniffed. "I reckon all of you will think now that I'm beholden to Ab Daniel. I don't bow to no human that ain't workin' with God an' His law. All this paper business is the devil's snare. Ab Daniel is Hell's chief agent. In the guise of a man doin' a kindness he is linkin' to 'im all you puny, weak-minded folks. He's led that boy away from the only way of light an' salvation; he's corrupted 'im by his blasphemous twist-in's and turnin's of God's Word, an' now he fastens the fangs an' claws of his ill-gotten gains about the young fool, an' will hold on to 'im an' drag 'im down to everlasting flames. They will run that paper betwixt 'em, will they? They will send the'r sly, half-hid views broadcast to the families of this section, an' folks blinded to truth like you will say they are doin' a good work. Howard will print stuff that the devil dictates, an' keep on holdin' high carnival with all them dancin', wine-drinkin' devils in that rotten Gomorrah of a town till God's wrath will descend on it in a whirlwind o' fire an' sweep it away. The Almighty has laid down His law. It is as simple an' plain as day, an' them that harden the'r heads an' disobey will be damned everlastingly. That's all thar is to it, but some won't take the trouble to read or listen to a man expound the Word who has

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made it a life-long study. That paper managed by them two will fall like a leper's claw on every family that subscribes for it. If a copy of it reaches my home I'll take a pair o' tongs and stick it in the fire unopened."

Mary was aghast at the storm she had so unintentionally raised. She was too young and well bred, and had too much reverence for even obstinate old age, to oppose even such old-fashioned views as Hiram's, and so, with a muttered apology, she walked away. Her elation, recently so active, now scarcely fluttered in her breast. She could not have explained why, but Hiram's carking wrath lay like a dead load on her spirits. If she had been less religious by nature, she could have risen to an anger that might have swept her over the situation; but she had long believed in Hiram as a righteous man who walked and talked with his God. She had once been a member of his Bible class in the little meeting-house, and his ready interpretation of Scripture had to her gentle mind been all sufficient. But she was being forced upon a fresh viewpoint now. Her religion had been a thing of joy and hope. Hiram's was the letter of the law, devoid of the spirit which was the young girl's life.

Hiram entered the house. Every evening at bedtime he read a few verses from the Bible, expounded their meaning to his wife, and then he knelt and prayed the sort of prayer that sounded well indeed to him, and which he could not doubt was received with approval by his Maker. He found his wife in the sitting-room. The satisfied glow on her patient face irritated him. The source of it, at any rate, was false. The joy burning in the woman's breast was a hell-born delusion. He said nothing; but, turning up the wick of the lamp on the table and winding the clock on the mantelpiece, he opened the big family Bible, thus signifying his intention of beginning the evening devotions.

"Take a chair," he said to his wife, coldly, as he slowly

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turned the pages of the book which contained innumerable slips of paper with penciled references to pages, verses, and chapters. There was silence, a silence on Mrs. Tinsley's part, that drew his attention to her, for she had made no movement, but stood rigid and erect.

"Set down," he said. "I'll find it in a minute. I know exactly the passage that fits the situation in which we unfortunately find ourselves, but I can't lay my hands on it all at once."

Still she made no movement toward the chair she usually occupied at the table opposite his own, and he stared at her impatiently.

"What ails you?" he demanded. "Hain't you finished yore work?"

"Yes, but I don't 'tend to listen to you read an' pray to-night," she said, firmly. "I don't want to, an' I won't."

"You say you *won't*?" Hiram's lip fell, his bushy brows clashed as he stared at her. "What under the sun has got in you?"

"I overheard what you said about Abner Daniel and Howard to Mary just now," she returned, calmly. "The Lord inspired Abner to make the sacrifice he did for our son's sake. He is a good man. He don't think like you do, because he can't grovel yore mire. He is on the mountain-top, while you live in a cave. He is spreadin' happiness an' good will right an' left. I know what you are lookin' for in that Book. I could turn to it in a minute; but ef I did I'd tear the leaf out an' stick it in the fire rather'n hear you twist it yore way. I'm full of joy to-night—so full that I don't want to spile it. If thar is a devil that is allowed to block our way, he speaks through you as often as through sech men as Abner Daniel. I don't know that thar is a devil. I know thar ain't one in the wide, wide world to-night that kin touch or hinder me."

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"Set down in that chair, I tell you!" Tinsley thundered, pale as death in his wrath. "You are my wife before the law, an' I am the head o' this establishment."

"I'll set when an' whar I want to set," the woman said, more deliberately than he had ever heard her speak. "You've been talkin' all these years, an' I've helt my tongue like a cow chewin' 'er cud, but I won't hold it to-night. Did you ever hear me say a thing that I didn't mean? Well, listen, if my child is turned away from the door of this house, one other time, I'll go too. If I don't I hope God will strike me dead in my tracks."

"You—you say that to me?" Hiram gasped. "To *me*?"

"Yes, to *you*!" the woman hurled back into his face. "If he had taken the train to-morrow I would never have eaten another bite under this roof. I had sworn it—I'd told God so in prayer after prayer. Go look in that trunk at the head o' my bed an' see if it ain't packed."

Bewildered, unbelieving, speechless, he stalked into her room. She heard him strike a match. Then she heard the air puff under the lid of the trunk as it shut, and Hiram, with slurring shoes, stalked back.

"So, so," he said, beneath his furious breath, "after marryin' me accordin' to God's law in His own house, after bearin' one child by me that's gone, an' one that still lives as a witness to the bindin' contract, you say you intended to leave my bed an' board? That is yore idea of obedience to the law which Saint Paul plainly says—"

"Saint Paul was a *man*," the woman broke in, fiercely. "He was not the grievin', desperate mother of a noble son who was bein' beat to earth by a father without the heart or sense of a gnat—a man so full of vain pride in his saintliness that it drips from 'im like the slime of a snail crawlin' on a wall. The Bible has been my mainstay sence I was a girl, but it ain't the Book you say it is. I

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don't have doubts as to its divine origin often, but if I do have 'em it is because it ain't proof agin a baby like you twistin' it out o' shape. Now, think over what I've said. Howard is plumb happy over his good fortune, an' when he comes here full enough o' forgiveness to beg yore pardon, as he intends to do, ef you treat him like you have done I'll leave you forever. As God is my witness, I mean it."

Without a word, unable for the first time in life to summon adequate speech, Hiram saw her turn to her room. She closed the door; he heard her slide the steel bolt into its socket. He sat down in his chair; with fumbling hands he opened the Bible on his quivering knees; listlessly he turned the leaves, seeking some passage to support his contention, only to desist under a feeling that was quite like despair. He knelt to pray; he at first thought of raising his voice loud enough to reach his wife's ears, thus making a cat's-paw of his Maker to humiliate her, but he was checked by the sheer absurdity of the impulse. For the first time in his life he was completely cowed. She would leave him—of that he was now sure, and what would he be without wife or son? And there was the wonderful popularity of the latter to be reckoned with. He recalled now the gentle protests of many of his church associates and of his Bible class against his treatment of his son. What would their verdict be on his wife's leaving him? Could it be possible that he, after all his biblical accuracy, might have erred? With the world saying his wife was a good woman and his son a rising man, would it harken to a father and husband such as he had become? He was afraid that it would not. Indeed, he was aghast at the ominous turn of the current. Why was he of late meeting with so much subtle opposition? Why did his younger pupils stare so blandly and indulgently when he insisted on the conditions of eternal damnation? Why did so many fail to see the

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necessity of faith without works as the only redemption from divine wrath? Unable to pray for the first time in many years, Hiram rose to his feet. According to habit, he took off his shoes in the sitting-room, and carefully placed them in the chimney-corner, the heels to the wall. Then in his stockinged feet he blew out the light and made his way to his bed. The rising moon threw its white rays on the spotless counterpane. It and the big pillows showed the care of a thoughtful housewife, as did the recently washed panes of the window, through which the moonlight fell on the scoured floor. He really must make a decision. Was it to be war to the end with wife and son, or must he, Hiram Tinsley, the authority on the higher life, admit defeat? He was unable to decide—that was the queer part of it—he simply could not decide. He lay awake during most of the night. At dawn he crept out of his room as softly as possible. Putting on his shoes, he went into the kitchen, kindled a fire in the chimney, and put on some water to boil. He must have his morning coffee to steady his nerves, and his making it himself would administer a rebuke to his wife, whose duty it had always been. She had threatened to leave. What if he himself should go away, at least for a while? The thought kindled his smoldering pride. His wife would miss him—she would perhaps worry over his whereabouts. He would escape for the present, at least, the ordeal of meeting his disobedient son. When the coffee was made he drank it while the unsettled grounds were floating on top, sullenly munching a piece of bread. It was still dark when he finished his meal. He crept back into his room, lit the lamp, and, taking from a closet a well-worn valise, he packed into it some shirts and underwear and softly tiptoed from the room. Out on the grass he glanced back toward the near-by window of his wife's room. The air was very still; the eastern sky showed only a bare hint of the coming light. Some roosters belonging

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to a neighbor were crowing; one of his own was flapping its wings in the stable-yard and lustily replying. Hiram was now sure that his unannounced trip away would bring his wife to terms. Living in the farm-house alone would not be to her taste. When he came back she would not dare to talk to him as she had done. What was that? He paused to listen. Was some one speaking? No; ah! now he understood. It was the snoring of his wife. What a humiliating incongruity! He had lost his usual rest, and was going off to spite a creature who was profoundly sleeping and would rise quite refreshed to meet the great joy which had fallen into her life. Would his going away actually affect a woman of that sort? The joy which had emboldened her to defy him for the first time in life might reasonably sustain her in his absence. Resting his valise on the ground, he leaned on the gate. He could not decide what to do. Suddenly he decided to stay, then was overwhelmed by the fear that the valise might betray his plan to go. His next thought seemed inspired for his special guidance. He acted on it. Softly striding to the open window of his room, he cautiously put the valise inside on the floor, telling himself that he would unpack it before she went in to put his room to rights. Then he turned down to his barn. Half an hour later, when he saw the kitchen door open, he walked up and entered. He had often risen before her, and his doing so now, he was sure, would appear only natural. She stood over the fire, a broom in her hand, sweeping up the crumbs of bread he had dropped on the hearth. Aided by the firelight he saw a placid smile on her face, and that was at once perplexing and irritating. He was about to say that he had had a headache and was not hungry, but she spoke first.

"If you had poured a little cold water in the coffee after it boiled you would not 'a' had to drink so many grounds," she said, indifferently. "That was the stale

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bread you ate, too." She now laughed impulsively. "I was goin' to put it in the slop for the pigs."

He moved farther into the room. Her words and tone were as strange as if they had come from a person he had never met before, and in sheer bewilderment his lower jaw hung quivering.

"Humph!" he sniffed, standing behind her. "Humph!" But he could think of nothing to say, and his sheer helplessness fairly appalled him.

"I had to go in yore room jest now," she said, as she added a stick of light wood to the fire. "One of the hens has got to layin' eggs in yore closet, an', as I need some fresh ones, I thought it would save a trip to the barn. While I was thar I noticed yore valise was packed. If you are goin' North you'd better hurry or you won't ketch the train. You didn't put in any socks, an' left out yore comb an' hair-brush. I'm sorter glad you are goin' now, because Howard will want me to stay with 'im at the hotel in town. He always told me that ef he settled thar permanently he'd make me live with 'im half the time."

Hiram was now bereft even of the power to sniff. He stood silent and still for a moment, then he said: "I decided not to go to-day. I've just remembered that I've got some business to attend to."

"I see," she said, considerably, as she lifted the lid of an iron pot with a hook. "I may not git away *myself* till to-morrow or next day. This house can be locked up safe enough. Thar ain't a bit o' danger o' anybody break-in' in these days. Howard may take a notion to rent a cottage in town, an' I'd need some o' this furniture. We'd like to have a spare room fer Mr. Daniel to sleep in any time he wants to stay in town. They will have night work to do in excitin' times such as elections an' the like."

Hiram thought of various references to the sayings of St. Paul that would fit the situation, as far as he was con-

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cerned, but he was not sure of their power to influence a woman so perverse as his wife.

"Abner Daniel!" he snarled. "It has come to this, then? You would fix an' work fer him an' leave *me* out altogether, eh?"

"You didn't say how long you'd be off, you see," Mrs. Tinsley went on, smoothly. "In fact, you didn't even tell me you was goin'—not that it makes *one bit* o' difference. I want to be with Howard. Folks sha'n't say *both* his parents is tryin' to put obstacles in his way. I glory in 'im. Some say he's like me. I glory in that, too. As fer what he prints about religion in his paper, that will tickle me, too. It 'll be right ef he does it. I've lived long enough to see that the risin' generation ought to stomp out every bit o' religion that you an' yore sort advocate. It is as dead as dry bones under the sun of a desert."

Hiram tried to reply, but failed. He swayed back and forth for a moment, then went into his room, opened his valise, and took out the contents and put them into the drawer of the bureau. He was full of consternation. Even his God had deserted him.

CHAPTER XIV

A FEW days later Abner and Howard were in full possession of all pertaining to *The Clarion*. Hillhouse, elated over a congratulatory telegram from his brother and the happiness of his wife over her coming change of residence, was in and out through the day giving this or that advice in regard to the management.

"I'm as green as a long-handled gourd in the business," Abner smiled at Howard, once when they were alone and working without their coats in the office; "but I'm willin' to learn new tricks. Stop me the minute I start to make a wrong move. You are the boss, but ef I kin help a little bit I'll be tickled. It is a new game to me, an' is goin' to give me a lot o' fun. As I see it, we must draft out a fresh policy an' make it known in our fust new issue. I'm glad you think the independent basis is good. I'm a Democrat dyed in the wool—it was shot into me like burnt powder from Yankee guns, an' some of it stuck to my bones; but I've got good friends that was Union men an' are Republicans now. I never liked to hear 'em called black, because they always treated me white. I've got friends that are Populists an' a few that fancy they are Socialists, an' I don't want to offend any of 'em. Bein' on the fence is a good thing, fer then we kin drap on the side o' any issue that needs our aid. Say, I want to tell you some'n', an' yet I feel sorter ashamed to do it."

"What is it?" Howard asked, deeply interested.

"Why, you see"—Abner actually blushed—"I don't want to brag or sound my own horn even to you, but since

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the report has got out of this deal of our'n a lot o' folks has come to me an' said that they wish I'd run a department on the editorial page under my own initials, an' write just as plain as I talk. Thar is a lot o' plain people in these mountains, an' they tie to plain things. With yore education you kin pander to the other sort o' folks, but if you don't object, why—"

"Object?" Howard cried, enthusiastically. "It will be the very life of the paper. You really are a philosopher, Uncle Ab; you don't know it, but you are."

"Well, anyways"—Abner took the compliment gracefully—"ridin' out home last night, an' even after I got to bed, a notion fer a sort of fust word from me kept runnin' in my head, an' this mornin' just after breakfast—out at the stable, of all places—I jotted it down. If—if you wouldn't mind I'll read it to you. It ain't so overly long, fer I've b'iled it down into as tight a wad as possible."

"Fire away!" Howard cried. "I'll bet it is all right."

Slowly Abner rose, and, going to his coat hanging from a nail on the wall, he took a crumpled piece of paper from a pocket. Unfolding it, and clearing his throat, he began to read aloud:

"'TO ONE AND ALL HEARTY GREETINGS.' How's that fer big type at the top of the fust column?" Abner asked, as he looked up.

"Splendid!" Howard cried. "Go ahead."

"'Friends an' fellow-citizens, old subscribers an' new,'" Abner complied in the declamatory tone of a rural preacher. "'We have taken hold of this newspaper with the intention o' pumpin' fresh, hot, red blood into 'er veins, of puttin' meat an' muscle on 'er bones, an' makin' 'er serve a useful purpose to the community.'" Here Abner paused and looked at Howard above the paper he was holding. "I'm a little afeard Hillhouse is goin' to be mad at that statement, as well as our changin' the name *Clarion* to *The New Clarion*; but he will be down in Au-

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gusta, an' needn't read it unless he likes. 'This here town,' Abner read on, "'has been in need of a live sheet for the last quarter of a century. *The Clarion* was flung to the breeze away before the War, but we ain't goin' to blow or brag about 'er age, fer her snail-pace in the past ain't nothin' to be proud of. We just know we've got a bang-up chance to make things hop, skip, an' hum, an' we are goin' to do it with the liveliest country weekly that ever come damp an' smellin' of ink from the press.'"

"Good, good; go on," Howard cried. "Couldn't be better, so far; go on."

"'In the first place, we are goin' to stand fer boomin' our town an' surroundin' country. We are goin' to advocate paved streets and sidewalks in town an' good usable roads in the country. Thar are some occupied an' unoccupied pig-pens right back of our sanctum, the stench o' which ain't to our taste, an' this mornin' we found a friend's brindle cow half-way up the stairs to our quarters. We don't know whether she was lookin' fer 'er calf or one of us. Last spring we saw seven wagons mired up to the hub within three miles of Darley, an' blushed with patriotic shame as we got down an' helped the owners make a corduroy road out o' fence-rails split an' owned by another man before the horses an' mules could stir a peg. We don't wish harm to other towns, but we are goin' to make Darley the metropolis o' the Cherokee section.

"'Another item: In takin' over this property we bought all debts owin' to *The Clarion*, an', as the Lord is our hope an' mainstay, we didn't know thar was so many crooks walkin' on two legs in decent society. Our worthy predecessor must have been an easy mark. We've spotted this gang, and from this on when we shake hands with one of them, an' say good mornin' or ask about the weather, we'll just have one thing in mind, an' that will be the coin that's jinglin' in the wrong pocket. We'll tell you what to do fer your rheumatism, how to avoid yore wife's tongue

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without a divorce, an' how to cure the sore on yore mare's back, when a black line is drawn across yore account—not before. The paper has been run careless, no doubt, owin' to a bad memory on the part o' the past owner. For one thing, it has been goin' through the mail to many men an' women who was put under ground in due form five years ago. Them we will cut off the list, whether they like it or not.

“Another item. Cash down is to be our slogan. We want it understood, too, that we have got enough home-knit socks to last a lifetime. We ain't runnin' a produce store, either. Time was when a farmer could pick up an over-ripe watermelon in his patch, catch a hen too old to lay or a rooster too nigh death to be gallant, take it to his editor an' leave a poem a yard long in memory of his wife's mother, an' call it square. But as both of us are confirmed bachelors, we ain't interested in table stuff or mother-in-laws. Some of you may kick over the traces at this plain talk, but if you kin kick harder than we do thar won't be any dash-board left. We can't build a paper or a town on hot air, an' we are goin' to make both of 'em hum an' whizz. A new railroad is bein' talked of in high financial circles, an' we believe we kin influence it to head this way. That assured, cotton factories, woolen mills, an' foundries will follow to make use of our wonderful buildin'-sites, water-power, an' other natural resources.”

Abner finished, and a sheepish expression stole into his face.

“Good, good; couldn't be better or more to the point!” Howard cried, enthusiastically.

“Well, have it set up, then,” Abner said, in relief, “an' we'll see how it looks in print. Thar is one thing you've got to learn me, an' that is how to make them dots an' pot-hooks on the edge o' the paper when you correct proofs. It is worse 'n Chinese to me.”

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"Don't bother about it," Howard advised. "Simply write in what you wish or cut out as you like."

"Thar is another idea I had," Abner went on, with less embarrassment. "See what you think about it. *The Clarion* has had for a good many years a mighty lively bunch o' rural correspondents that hit an' slap at one another in a witty an' friendly way. Now, to my mind, they can be made a wonderful help to us."

"They certainly can," Howard declared. "They know how to write, and they have plenty of time to give to it."

"Well, my idea is to make 'em even more interested than they ever have been," Abner suggested, "an' this is what occurred to me: Livin' so wide apart, as they do, half of 'em ain't seen the other half, an' it would be a lot o' fun to fetch 'em together in a sort o' whoopin'-up convention here in town. I'm willin' to pay fer the grub, an' I'd like to give a big spread some night at the Johnston House, an' have music an' speeches, an' even dancin' ef they like."

"You are as full of original ideas as a nut is of meat, Uncle Abner," Howard said, in great admiration. "A meeting like that will interest our general readers as well as all the correspondents themselves."

"Well, we'll announce it, then, an' I'll speak to Tom Sugart about the dinner. It will tickle him, too, fer he will git good advertisin' out of it. I'll bet he will make me a rate at so much a head that won't break me. He'll try himself on the cookin', too."

At this juncture they heard the sound of steps on the stair, and Tarp, the merchant, bustled in.

"I was passing," he said, wiping his perspiring brow on a cheap handkerchief with the price-mark on it, "an' I thought I'd drop in an' indorse yore move. Say, gentlemen, I'll bet you haven't thought about it—I mean you haven't once thought of J. L. Tarp in connection with your new enterprise; but I'll bet you will when I tell you

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a thing or two. To begin with—wait! There is a fellow down below with two bales of cotton that I've bid on. If I get the cotton he will buy ten bolts of sheeting, a lot of boots and shoes from me, and a supply o' coffee and sugar. I don't want the Jews across the street to nab 'im. They've been chinning him for an hour—fairly crying on his shoulders—telling him I was a faker; but I think I've got 'im nailed. I told the brood of children he had with him that when they got to my place I'd give them all a big stick of candy each. They won't let the old man rest till he hitches at my store. I hardly sell a pound o' candy a week, but I buy it by the barrel at wholesale rates to give away."

Tarp here thrust his head and shoulders out of a window, and, with his hands on the outer sill, called:

"Drive it down to the side door, old man, an' dump it off. The boys will allow you good weight. All right, all right. You know the big red sign over the sidewalk—'Tarp's Emporium'?" The merchant drew his head in and smiled in satisfaction. "He had already started. The candy did the work. One of the little boys was holdin' the reins, an' another was whippin' up the team. One of the Jews was runnin' along at the side pleadin' like the woods afire, but I landed my man. I really ought to be there to see that cotton put on the scales, though. Those bales may be water-logged."

"Water-logged?" Howard inquired. "What is that?"

"Oh, now an' then a bale is soaked clean through with water, left in the creek over night to give it weight. I've run a sampler into a bale in my time an' got out enough water to satisfy the thirst. A bale o' that sort when it lies on the ground will start a regular spring."

"That's the farmer's stick-candy racket," Abner remarked, dryly. "But you said you come in to tell us—"

"Oh yes, I was about to let you fellows know where I come in on this new deal of yours. Money in your till,

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of course, is the main thing, an' I'm a free spender with a home paper if it is a good one. Now, the glad tidings of J. L. Tarp's Dry-goods and General Merchandise Emporium is spreading over three counties around Darley. My cut-price system is doing a lot to build up the town, and all my advertisements are gobbled up like election returns. They say you have knocked out the patent inside idea, and you will want to fill that space with something fresh and catchy. Now, I'm just the man to fill it with items about what is takin' place in my emporium. Time after time I've come to Hillhouse with the intention of sticking in a full-page ad, but he wouldn't listen to me. He figured on 'em once or twice, an' wanted to charge me at a rate that no live business man could stand. So he forced me to send to Rome to have my handbills printed. Now, I'm goin' to bring in the copy for a bang-up full-page announcement, and if you can meet my estimate, why, I'll know that the right men have got hold of *The Clarion* at last."

"Have you any idea how much you could afford to pay for a full-page ad in our next issue?" Abner asked. "We are goin' to send out an' give away five thousand copies, so the public will know we are here. An ad in that issue would be a whoppin' big thing fer you."

"I haven't figured on it," Tarp deliberated, "and I figure on everything, even to the twine we use in tying up bundles at the wrapping-counter; but at a rough guess I should say that I could pay twenty-five dollars."

"For the ink an' paper?" Abner winked slyly at Howard and half smiled.

"For the whole thing," the merchant said, firmly. "You will be short of news, and I tell you that I get an ad up in a way that is so bright and full o' meat that folks cut 'em out and paste 'em in their scrap-books an' read 'em out loud at school exhibitions. I'm simply great on the local column ad—the sort that fools the reader till the

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very end, and then busts like a fire-cracker. Sometimes I make 'em study pretty hard before the idea is fully reached. I got up one two years ago that folks mention even to-day. If it didn't take too long I'd turn back to your files and read it to you. But it ran something like this, if I remember right:

"The other morning, as Judge Lumpkin'—he's a good friend of mine and didn't care—as the Judge was coming to town on foot, and was crossing the little bridge at the end of Chester Street, just inside the incorporate limits, he was astounded to see a human foot sticking out from beneath the bridge. Fully alarmed, and quite out of breath, in suspense and suspicion of foul play, the Judge stepped down off the bridge so he could see better, and there, almost covered with rubbish, he found the body of a tramp. Quickly going to town, the Judge sent out the alarm, and the coroner and a jury of citizens sat on the remains, which by this time was fully displayed to sight. Nobody could identify the man or find out where he was from, but a very unusual thing was discovered. The tramp had a head that was completely bald of hair, and painted on the skin in black letters were the words:

"Fell dead while hurrying to Tarp's mammoth reduction sale on women's hosiery."

"All right—pretty good," Abner smiled; "but it seems strange that a hobo like that would be so anxious to buy women's stockin's."

"That's the very, *very* point," Tarp chuckled. "Folks were askin' that question everywhere and makin' guesses. Some said he wanted to go peddlin' with a pack full of them; some said he was returning to his wife after a long absence and wanted to make her a nice present; others said it had no point an' was just one of J. L. Tarp's famous jokes."

"I don't exactly like that sort of fun-makin'," Abner said. "I saw a little item like that in a local column

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out West that come nigh endin' in a shootin' scrape. The wife of a fellow by the name of Seth Harlow that had been married only a year or so gave birth to a baby. Now Seth an' the editor of the paper was purty good friends, an' sometimes joked a little with one another, an' when the editor made mention of the event he fixed it up so's the joke was on Seth."

"I see," Tarp said, seriously. "The fellow didn't like it, did he?"

"You'd have thought so if you'd seen him with a glare in his eye an' a gun in his hip pocket makin' fer that office. The editor got on his knees an' begged for his life. Ever since then I've thought that a newspaper ought to be careful about such things. But to come down to business, you think twenty-five dollars is a fair price for a full-page ad in *The New Clarion*? Ef you don't double it the type won't be set up in this office. We intend to live an' let live. You think yore shebang is goin' to draw grist to our mill, but the shoe is on t'other foot—the one with the corn on it that seems to bother you this mornin'."

"I'm afraid we can't work together, then," Tarp sighed.

"Not fer yore stick candy, anyway," Abner laughed. "Save that fer children to suck. Me'n' Howard are a-goin' to git paid fair fer every ad that is printed in our paper, an' don't you forget it. Now, I've got a little piece o' stick candy fer *you*, J. L., an' you kin suck it on the way to the store. Them Jews across the street have already been talkin' about some big display ads. We won't have space fer more than one full-page ad in our fust issue, an' ef they take it, it will pay 'em like smoke. They say they have bought out a whoppin' big bankrupt stock in Cleveland that's bein' shipped here now, an' they want to announce it. They say they will throw it on the market at half price. It will create a big stir in financial circles, an' do us some good to have sech a whoopin'-up rally in

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front of our office, for we will git a whack at the mob goin' an' comin' an' collect some old accounts an' nail down some new subscribers."

With a subtle smile Tarp was leaving when Hillhouse came in. Jerking his thumb in the direction of the vanishing merchant, he said: "Look out fer him. He is the hardest chap to make terms with in seven states. He wiggles like an eel when you try to pin him down to reasonable prices."

"We've got his measure," Abner laughed. "Ef he beats us he will be welcome to all he makes. What do you think the scamp offered us fer a full-page display ad in our main issue?"

"I haven't the slightest idea, being as he knows you are green—I mean a fresh hand—at the business," Hillhouse said, with no little pride. "He naturally would be on the lookout for a pick-up."

"He offered twenty-five dollars," Abner said, with contempt; "but I told him to look an' see ef we had moss on our backs or green in our eyes."

Hillhouse was about to speak when Tarp clattered back up the stairs. Pausing in the doorway, he said: "Well, fellows, it is pretty tough on me to have to double my price on that ad, but I'll take your offer. I'll send the copy down at once."

When he had gone Hillhouse stood eying Abner. "So you made him an offer, I see."

"Yes, a sort o' one." Abner glanced at Howard and back at Hillhouse. "I told 'im he'd have to double the offer he made. He fust said twenty-five. He now pays fifty—some little difference, eh?"

"*Fifty?*" Hillhouse glanced at Abner sympathetically. "He's already done you, Ab. If you figure it up you can't make a profit on less than seventy-five."

"You don't say!" Abner's countenance fell. There was a touch of red in his cheeks, a flare of chagrin in his

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eyes. "Well, he kin crow *this* time, but a burnt child is afeard o' the fire, an' I'll watch that skunk close from now on. I'll git it back, too; you see ef I don't."

"If you do it will be after he's dead," Hillhouse smiled. "He's the sharpest trader I ever met."

CHAPTER XV

THE dinner to be given to the country contributors—the 'Dotters,' as they had playfully called themselves—was, according to *The New Clarion's* announcement, to be unsurpassed in sumptuous splendor. It was gotten up to bring writers of congenial tastes into agreeable personal intercourse for the first time in the history of local journalism. The obliging and far-famed Boniface of the Johnston House, his efficient clerk, and corps of accommodating waiters and porters were to throw open their doors to the bright representatives of *The New Clarion* under auspices never before equaled. For the first time these contributors, many of whom had had friendly tilts in the public arena of wit and repartee, were going to meet face to face and clasp hands in good-fellowship and the resolve to promote the interests of the liveliest weekly in north Georgia. The massive introductory number of the new series had fairly astounded the public. Five hundred new names already had been added to the list of subscribers, and good wishes filled the air. As might be seen from the copious extracts on the second page, the big dailies of the state were commenting favorably on the enterprise, and the paper was already considered a phenomenal and assured success.

The day arrived. The weather was crisp and cool enough to be agreeable. Every invited correspondent had accepted. Early in the afternoon they began to arrive, in buggies, on horseback, and by train. They were noticeable on the streets from their spick-and-span

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appearance and their strolling about like tourists from spot to spot in groups or alone. Abner had supplied badges of blue silk, on which were printed in gold letters the words "The Dotters' Dinner," and Frank Reymond, a friend of Howard's, a member of the social set of the town, who sometimes telegraphed important news to the city papers, had proffered his services, and was distributing the badges and introducing the delegates one to another.

About four o'clock Abner went into the hotel, finding Tom Sugart behind the counter in the office.

"How goes it, Tom?" he asked, affably. "Got all you kin do, I reckon?"

"Full up," Sugart smiled. "Most of 'em are up to snuff, if they *are* from the backwoods. You know you said set aside a spare room for the men and one for the women to wash and change in, at your expense, but, bless your life! they all ordered rooms to themselves, and insist on paying for that, anyway. There ain't a single woman down for the room for general use, and the men, now that they are on to the idea, are following suit to the last one on the list. It is wonderful what pride will do for country folks in such a case. They got the notion that it would be more stylish for 'em to have privacy, and they are demanding it. I can understand why the women want a place to change in alone, for all of 'em brought along big valises, and I think they intend to spring surprises on one another. You'll see some fine togs, Uncle Ab. The women, as a rule, are good-lookers and young enough to know what's what. Tarp says his dressmaker has mighty near worked her fingers to the bone filling orders."

"Well, say"—Abner leaned thoughtfully over the register and slid his long finger over the names on the fresh page—"remember, Tom, that they ain't to pay a cent extra for them rooms. Add it on to my bill."

"I don't know what to do about that, Uncle Ab," Sugart frowned. "I'm afraid they've got me in a corner."

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The women one and all pinned me down sharp on that very point. In fact, they held a regular powwow over it in the parlor, an' asked me to be present. I felt odd, I'm here to say, in so much chatter and excitement. You see, they all know how liberal you are, and they simply will not let you pay for anything beyond the banquet to-night. All of them brought along a snack to eat, sort of picnic fashion, and they had it on the grass in the court-house yard, the idea being, it seems, to avoid any discussion as to what you are to pay; but the *room* business—that seemed to spring up after they got here and begun to try to outdo one another. One woman—the girl that writes them lively letters from Dogwood under the name of 'Patty Quinn'—she's bright-eyed and a glib talker. You may have seen her. She is as slim as a snake, always on the move, either with her hands, head, or feet, and wears her hair in a sort of fluffy bunch over her left eye. She made quite a speech, and I'd advise you to call on her to-night for a word or two; I'll bet she has something up her sleeve. She had us all laughing. She said serious, though, that no decent, self-respectin' lady of the dear old Southland would for one instant let two unmarried men pay a cent toward a room in a hotel that she had been in, even if only to wash the dust off her finger-tips, or use her powder puff, much less to lie down to rest or spend the night. They all agreed to this an' told me to lay the matter before you in due form, with the hope that you will see the point and act accordingly."

"Well, I didn't look fer the like to happen," Abner declared, regretfully. "I wanted to pay all that is to be paid, bein' as they write fer nothin'; but, as I have always contended, Tom, the fact is that no true gentleman ought to insist on payin' for anything a woman gits when she declares it is her wish to have it otherwise. Sech matters are awkward—breakin' furniture in the house of a friend, for instance. I remember in my young days I was payin'

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my respects to a lady one evenin', an' a chair I set in broke—"

"Wasn't strong enough fer *two*, I see." Sugart winked and smiled.

"No, it wasn't that," Abner answered. "You needn't think it was. In fact, I was in the settin'-room by myself when it happened. The chair was a spindly affair too frail fer a cat to sleep in with safety. I'd never called on the young lady before, an' I was naturally excited. I busted it while she was primpin' in 'er room up-stairs."

"Oh, she didn't see you do it, then?" the clerk said.

"No; I started to tell you." Abner was smiling remniscently now. "An' it didn't make enough noise to give me away, either, fer in them days I was a great player of what we used to call 'town-ball,' and was as quick on my feet as a flyin' squirrel. So I threw back my hands when I felt myself goin', an' caught before I struck the floor. One o' the hind legs had give way, but I stuck it back in place an' set the chair agin the wall whar I'd found it. Just then I heard her comin' down the stairs, an' tuck a seat on the sofa an' tried to look unconcerned. You see, I was well enough brought up to know that I ort not to offer pay for the damage, bein' a guest under her roof, but still a young feller of the age I was naturally would be ashamed at awkwardness of that sort, an'—"

"I see, and so you left it against the wall," Sugart smiled. "Did she ever git on to it?"

"She might have done it ef a powerful lucky thing fer me hadn't happened." Abner smiled more broadly than before. "Thar was a young dude of a feller that was powerful stuck up because his folks owned a lot o' niggers an' a river-bottom plantation. He always treated us farm-boys like we was under 'im—hardly noddin' to us at times, he was so lordly. Well, he happened to drive up to make his call, too. He was all dickered out with a high collar an' tight doeskin pants, an' cuffs that reached

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plumb down to his finger-nails. He shook hands with the young lady, looked at me like I was some rubbish that had blowed in at the open door, an' then made for the chair. I could have saved 'im," Abner chuckled, "an' ef he'd been a friend I would at the cost of my own reputation; but I let 'im alone. He sat down purty sudden like, an' great was the fall. To this day I kin see that feller's eyes as they rolled back in his head when he sprawled down an' lay kickin' before us. The lady helped 'im up, an' declared the chair was already broken an' the like; but I was the cool one durin' that call. He seemed awfully down-hearted an' put out. But, say, Tom, you are goin' to have enough grub to-night, ain't you?"

"Leave that to me, Uncle Ab." Sugart rubbed his palms together as if quite elated. "You said you could stand a dollar a head, and we are spending all of it and some more. We want them writers to remember the Johnston House to the end of their days. A dinner like this has never been given in Darley."

"As I said," Abner returned, "there is only two items for the palate that I stick out fer, an' that is fried chicken an' ice-cream; an' yes, good, strong coffee to top off on."

"Ice-cream!" Sugart clapped his hands as he began rubbing them afresh. "You surely have heard of that famous Atlanta brand that has the run clean to the Florida coast with all the big bugs that stop at the palace hotels? It ain't any of your boiled custard makeshift, but solid, thick cream from the cow froze as hard as a snow-ball. We are looking for three freezers of it up on the six-forty. As for chicken, your friend Pole Baker hauled in a coop of the fattest that ever pecked and scratched in a barn-yard. He said he would let them go fer your dinner, but wouldn't have sold them to anybody else."

"They will dish up all right," Abner said. "I've seen them. I wish I could have put Pole down for an invite,

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but he has no newspaper connection, you see, an' I can't ask one outsider without doing the same generally."

"We are making a new departure for us," Sugart explained. "Women are great hands to tie on to new wrinkles, and we want to make them see that we know what's what. This is not to be a regular dump-all-in-a-pile dinner, Uncle Ab. On an extra occasion like this the old-fashioned way of passing dishes from one to another to help himself isn't up to the latest mark. I'm going to serve the whole thing in courses."

"Courses? You mean—"

"Yes," Sugart ran on, enthusiastically, "a decent quantity served on a plate all to itself, and then a wait between to give them a chance to talk and make jokes. We will have seven courses all told, beginning with *boolyon*."

"Bool what?" Abner's brows clashed.

"*Boolyon*—that's a new sort o' thin, French soup that is all the go at swell banquets. I got on to it at the hotel men's convention in Atlanta last winter. The only trouble we are going to have with that particular item is that *boolyon* is served, as a general thing, in flat cups specially made for it; but, as I haven't anything of the sort, I'm going to use the big-size coffee-cup—without the saucer, of course. I won't tell you all the various dishes, for I want to surprise you as well as the rest. You've left it to me, you know, and I want to open eyes generally in this community. Folks may think this town is slow, but after to-night they won't sniff at the *cuisine* of the Johnston House. Why, I'm even going to have little *men-use* at every plate. See? I go on tellin' you, though I said I wouldn't."

"Men use what? I don't quite catch on." Abner was agreeably perplexed.

"Oh, I mean bills of fare, if you want the plain old English term," Sugart explained, loftily. "They are a

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great help at a banquet. For instance, when a guest sees plainly what is coming he won't be so apt to fill up to the neck on the first course or two an' have no room to do justice to the balance. You see, I want them to approve of the thing all the way through. There is a wrinkle I could add on, but somehow I think maybe it would be goin' 'most too far."

"What's that?" Abner asked.

"Why, I could have the *menuse* in the French language," was the reply. "I've got a little book for the special use of hotel keepers that shows you how to turn every known dish into French. For instance, fried chicken would be—but I forget just now what the words are. I'd have to look. It don't matter; you catch the idea."

"Yes, but I reckon you'd better leave that out," Abner opined, dryly. "If what you've jest give me is a fair sample o' French as spoke by a man not actually born to it, I'm afraid most of us would make a botch of it."

"It would be one way of making your guests sample *all* the courses, if they were doing the ordering," Sugart suggested; "but we are going to shove the whole line in, anyway. That is the latest banquet style in high circles. A feller takes it easy—lets it come in due order, and eats or lets it go back to the kitchen untouched, just as the notion strikes him."

At this moment the sound of a hammer was heard above. "What is that?" Abner wanted to know.

"That is another surprise," Sugart said, unctuously. "It is Frank Reymond's idea. Frank's been about the world considerable, and is a bang-up good man to engineer a swell function. He'd rather help out in a case like this than eat. He sent some coons with a wagon out in the country, and they brought back a lot of evergreens. The banquet-hall and the parlor is to be gorgeously decorated. It was Frank's idea about the tables, too."

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"What about the tables?" Abner asked, quite elated.

"Why, Frank is having them placed in the form of a letter D. You see, D stands for Dotters, Daniel, or Darley. He says that, as the toast-master, you must sit right on the curve of the D with your pick of the fair sex on each hand, in plain view of all."

"Toast-master?" Abner's face fell. "They don't think I'm goin' to do that, do they?"

"They are all expecting it," Sugart replied, with a mischievous smile. "You'll have to do it, Uncle Ab. No banquet will run smooth without a head. There are some good talkers in that bunch of delegates, and they'll need somebody to prod them up."

"But I don't know how to do sech a thing, an' I'm not goin' to make a jack o' myself," Abner protested, in no little confusion.

"Oh, it is as easy as falling off a log!" Sugart declared. "I've never done it myself, exactly, but I could. After coffee and nuts, you make a little address of welcome in general, and then if you strike a snag, and can't think of anything further worth while, you pick out a man or woman and say, something like this:

"'Mr. Chairman, ladies and gentlemen, I'm sure that everybody present on this festive occasion would like to hear from our brother who drives the quill so charmingly in the pleasantest of all dales, Beaverdale, which lies between the rugged and towering peaks of—' You see, I know how to do it. I was just giving you a sample."

"But how do you stop the dang thing?" Abner was perplexed while comforted. "If I called on all of 'em we'd be thar at sun-up, an' I'd have to pay for their breakfast."

"You'd have to put on a time-limit—say five or ten minutes to each, and beg 'em not to overstep it; besides, a few will be too backward. Everybody is not equally gifted. Of course, they will all want to drink the health of the new paper, and give a bumper to you and Howard besides."

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"Drink our health? What with—that thin *bool* soup?" Abner was smiling broadly.

"Oh, there I go again! I'll let you on to all our surprises before I get through. But the fact is, Uncle Ab, Frank Reymond has concocted the dandiest punch you ever stuck lip to. It won't offend anybody, no matter what scruples they have, for it is clear in color an' has sliced oranges an' other fruit floating on top. He has put a stick in it that is just sharp enough to liven a man up and not drop him on the floor. We had some bother about what to serve it in. To be exactly proper, we ought to have a regular punch-glass, a little squatty thing with a handle like the *boolyon*-cup, but we had nothing to spare, as the water goblets will all be in use. We were plumb stumped when Frank happened to think we might borrow something from Tarp's crockery department that would do. By great good fortune we found that Tarp happened to have a crate of wine-glasses that he ordered by mistake several years ago, and he is lending them to us with the understanding that if any are broken he will be recompensed. Tarp didn't say it in so many words, but he would like the best in the world to have his donation mentioned as coming from his big establishment, and if you could work it into your remarks it would only be fair to him."

"I see, he wants an 'ad,'" Abner smiled. "He is plumb daft on the subject. It wouldn't surprise me to hear that Tarp has his coffin ready in case of accident, an' that it is lettered all over with remarkable cash inducements."

"I see." Sugart laughed at his own wit. "'Immediately after the funeral step into Tarp's Emporium and look at the sweeping reduction in prices which, owing to the proprietor's demise,' and so forth."

"That's the idea," Abner smiled. "I reckon he will want to come in an' look on after dinner, anyway. Mary Trumbley is comin', an' he is tryin' to be her shadow here lately."

CHAPTER XVI

ABOUT seven o'clock that evening Abner brought Mary to town in his buggy. As they drove up the main street to the hotel they noticed that the long front veranda over the sidewalk was illuminated by many varicolored Japanese lanterns. Another pleasure greeted them, for the town brass-band, which had proffered its services to the occasion, was on the veranda, and Abner's arrival was a signal for them to begin playing.

"Fine, fine!" Abner chuckled, as he reined in at the door and a negro porter ran forward to take his horse in charge. "I feel as frisky as a young colt," he said, as he helped Mary to alight. "Ef I start to make a fool o' myself to-night I want you to call me down. I hain't had a drop to drink, but I feel funny all over."

"As if you were going to get married," Mary jested.

"That's the idea," Abner smiled, as he gallantly held out his hand to help her up the steps. "I wouldn't feel so blamed odd if I didn't have on this long Jim-swinging coat. I'm afraid I'll actually melt in it. I can't remember ever havin' it on in the summer-time before. If you hadn't made such a fuss over it I'd have wore my alpaca knockabout. If I'm to do any talkin' to-night—an' Tom Sugart says I must sort o' lead out—I want to feel cool and comfortable. My thoughts seem to leak out when I sweat free."

At the head of the stairs on the parlor floor they met Howard and Frank Reymond. They were both in evening dress. Frank had a great tray of damp buttonhole

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bouquets, which he was pinning on the lapels of the men's coats as they arrived. Abner submitted gracefully to his decoration, while Howard piloted Mary to the ladies' dressing-room. He was waiting for her in the corridor when she came out.

"I have never seen you look so well," he declared, admiringly, as he looked at her simple white dress and flowers. "The drive has given you a splendid color."

Mary dropped her eyes. It was hard for her to conceal the pleasure his words gave her. She elected to change the subject.

"Up to six o'clock this afternoon," she said, "I was in hopes that your mother and father would come; but they decided that they'd rather not sit up so late, and they heard that the hotel was crowded too much for them to get a room. Oh, Howard, I wish you knew how happy your mother is over your success and remaining here. She can't talk of anything else, and as for your father—"

"Oh, he will always be sour over it," Howard said, quickly. "He is down on Uncle Ab and will denounce anything he touches. We simply can't listen to him, Mary. We've got to be our own judges and act accordingly."

"But it has changed him," Mary declared. "He is not the same—not so vindictive. He made a little talk at Sunday-school last Sunday, and I felt rather sorry for him. It looked as if he were trying to be more liberal. There has been so much said over *The New Clarion* and its chances under your care that he simply had to lay aside open opposition."

"I have heard a great many compliments from the delegates I have met to-day about your letters to the paper," Howard said. "They all like them. I have just set up your last and corrected the proofs. Has Uncle Ab mentioned it to you yet? He says that a little later you simply must be our society editor."

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"He doesn't mean it, surely," Mary said, "though I would like it very much."

"Well, he is going to ask you to do it before long," Howard assured her. "It would be very nice to have you in the office with us. You can help us enormously by your advice."

As they were going toward the door of the parlor, whence came the music of some one playing on the piano, they saw Cora Langham, beautifully attired in a stylish gown, come down the stairs and join Frank Reymond at the table holding the flower-tray.

"I did not know that she was to be present," Mary said, coldly. "I thought the entertainment was confined to—"

"She will not be at the dinner," Howard explained, a little awkwardly. "But as a guest of the hotel—in fact, all the guests have been invited to look on and join in the dance afterward, if they wish. You see, there is no other way. It wouldn't do, you know, to deprive traveling men and summer boarders of the use of the verandas and parlor in such warm weather."

"I think if I had been in *her* place, though," Mary said, "I would not have put on quite such an elaborate dress, and surely she might have amused herself in her room for *one* evening."

"But, you see, she and her mother come away from the city to pass the time pleasantly, and an affair like this is, after all, a sort of diversion."

"It will be to *her*," Mary replied. "She will sniff and sneer at everybody and everything. I can see it on her face already. She knows well enough that none of these country girls can dress as she is dressed. It looks as if natural womanly instinct would have—"

"Mary, Mary," he laughed, "that is your only fault. I've never heard you criticize any other human being; but whenever Cora Langham's name comes up you hammer her for all she is worth."

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"I can't help it. I don't like her, and I never could."

"Well, *don't!*" he laughed. "Look at Frank; he is daft about her—so is Uncle Ab. In fact, everybody is."

"All you men are, of course," Mary returned, coldly. "I believe that woman's one aim in life is to see how many men she can keep at her beck and call. It only argues that you are weak, that is all—that you allow yourselves to be driven and led like a bunch of stupid sheep."

The conversation was ended by Abner, who came for Mary with the intention of introducing her to the "Dot-ters," who now filled the big parlor.

"They all want to meet you," he said, "especially the men."

"Ah, now it is *your* turn!" Howard said, teasingly. "Be careful, Mary; those fellows are just as much like sheep as any of Cora Langham's admirers, and if you don't mind you may have to take some of your own medicine."

Tossing her head, and with her hand on Abner's arm, Mary turned away, not wholly displeased with Howard's jest.

At this moment Miss Langham left Reymond pinning a *boutonnière* on a man's coat, and came toward Howard with a seductive smile on her lips.

"I am awfully proud of you this evening," she said, her wonderful eyes kindling as they met his. "This is a triumph for you in particular. You are the center of it all. But for your brains and energy all this would not be taking place. Mr. Daniel told me yesterday that the paper was doing wonderfully well. I saw you talking to Mary Trumbley just now. Mr. Daniel says she writes, too. She looks like a smart girl. She has a rather pretty face. I'm sure you like her."

"Yes, very, very much," Howard answered, sincerely. "She is the best and truest friend I have."

Miss Langham winced slightly and gave him a re-

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proachful glance from her shadowy eyes. "You say that to me," she said, "after all I have said to you?"

"You have *said* a good many things," Howard laughed, softly and significantly; "but Mary has *done* so many that I can't count them. But there is no use in our talking about her; you'd have to know her as well as I do to understand."

Cora frowned as she led him along the corridor toward the veranda, where the band was still playing. She had taken his arm, and he felt her delicate fingers contract upon it.

"Howard," she said, with a little sigh, "you make me very angry at times. Do you know, you are the only man that has ever dared to speak to me as you do?"

He looked down into the beautiful eyes, which were so full of reproach. The upturned face seemed as pure and guileless as that of a child. Once again he felt her influence on him. He wanted to clasp her in his arms; he wanted to kiss her; he might have declared his love, or what he blindly fancied was love. She read the passionate flare in his eyes, pressed his arm again, looked down, and sighed anew. As he had made no response, she said, softly, "Do you really think you are treating me fairly?"

"Yes, or I would act otherwise," he said, frankly. Then, as he smiled, he felt himself somewhat immune from the impulse which had just possessed him. "Cora, we might as well understand each other. You are a flirt, and I do not approve of it; you are a flirt, and you know it."

"I am not," she said, not wholly displeased. "There is a difference between the girl who likes to be admired because she is rather pretty and attractive—between the one who loves to be liked by others and the girl who is incapable of genuine affection."

"What is the good of my criticizing you, even to gain a point in an argument?" he said, facing her suddenly

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and causing her hand to fall from his arm. "You are absolutely beautiful; you have a wonderful magnetic something about you that men can't resist—that is, men who do not stop to think what it all means. I think I know what it means, and I am simply standing away from it, that's all."

"You *think* you know." She stared steadily, with a vague, thwarted expression in her eyes, her lips set firm. "Oh, you are so wise!"

"Yes, I know that you are playing a great game," he returned, with a gentle smile, "and it has become second nature to you. Men are tenpins to you. The bigger the bunch the more fun you have knocking them down. I amount to nothing compared to other men who have followed you from place to place. Many of them are rich and brainy; but, all the same, I do not want to be classed with them. I have heard men say that they would not marry a girl who was not desired by many others; but I am not like that for certain well-grounded reasons."

"What are they, you stupid boy?" She took his arm again, and they strolled out on the veranda and to the far end, where they were quite alone.

"To be frank, and you make me frank, Cora; you force it on me, for I don't like false pretensions even with women—to be frank, if a pretty girl has innumerable followers it is her fault."

"Fault? Humph!"

"Yes, fault is the word," he answered, firmly, and he laid his hand fearlessly on her shoulder for a bare instant, as if for emphasis. "No other man of your acquaintance would say this to you, perhaps, but it is true, nevertheless. Nature has blessed you with beauty and power, but you are misusing them. You have acquired a habit that is as abnormal as the use of morphine, but you don't realize it. You are feverish and excited over your game of winning hearts and crushing them. Even if you pos-

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sessed the love of the truest, noblest man in the world it would not satisfy you. After marriage, perhaps even after being a mother, you'd still want the attention of men. Your husband would have no actual home life, your children would have no proper example and would grow up to the same sort of false life that you were in."

Cora stood still and silent for a moment, her eyes on the musicians, who were leaving the veranda.

"I know what you think of me, anyway," she faltered, her lips quivering visibly in the light of the Japanese lanterns against the brick wall; "but even you can't understand a woman. So a girl is to blame for having many admirers, is she? That is a new idea, Howard. I presume you think Mary Trumbley would not have them even if she could."

"She happens to be the sort of girl who really wouldn't care for them," he answered.

"Indeed! Has she been tried?" Cora demanded, sarcastically. "How do you know? How does she know?"

"That is hard to answer," Howard replied. "I have only my intuition for it. There are perfectly beautiful women in the world who never seem to think about it, and simply could not use their beauty to attract or hold admirers. Mary has beauty, too," he added, thoughtfully, "but it is more spiritual than physical."

"Oh, has she?" Cora was now smiling. "You ought to know, for you have seen a great deal of her."

"She has a most beautiful character," Howard went on. "She has been a wonderful friend to me and to my mother. I would be the most ungrateful man in the world if I did not appreciate her friendship. Her life is not all rose-strewn as yours is. She has to work hard, almost like a common servant, and has suffered a lot in many ways."

"I believe you are falling in love with her," Cora said, a perplexed stare in her eyes as she fixed them on his face.

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"No, it isn't that," he answered; "but we are true friends, and shall always be so."

A string-band was now playing in the dining-room below. There was the rumble of many feet on the stairs. The guests were going down to dinner, and Howard led his companion back into the bustling corridor.

A few minutes later Mrs. Langham, who was in her daughter's room reading a magazine, was surprised to see Cora enter the door, a doleful expression on her face as she went to the bureau and stood before the glass.

"Why have you come up, dear?" Mrs. Langham inquired, carelessly.

"They have all gone down to dinner," Cora said, "and I am tired."

"But you want to go to the dance later, don't you?" the lady asked.

"I shall not sit up and wait for it," Cora answered, listlessly. "They will have a lot of speeches, and it may be eleven o'clock before they leave off."

"I wish we could all look on at the dinner," Mrs. Langham laughed. "That is the oddest mixture of persons I ever saw. There was one girl that impressed me—the one who was in the parlor with Howard the other day. She made me think of the girls back in Virginia. She seemed so easy and self-possessed."

"Mary Trumbley," Cora said, turning and staring steadily. "She really is a nice girl. She has talent, too. She *does* look nice, doesn't she? They say she writes well and has read a lot."

CHAPTER XVII

THE dinner passed most agreeably, and when it was over Abner stood up at his place and made a tinkling sound with the point of his knife on an empty goblet, which gradually evoked silence on the gay company.

"Hear, hear! Speech, speech!" cried a lively talker, a man named Wilson, who was large, bald, and had a crude wooden leg strapped to his knee and thigh, and who, over the frank pseudonym of "Peg-leg," wrote weekly letters from Dawnville noted for their cheerful philosophy.

This was followed by considerable applause; and Abner, bowing right and left, had to wait till it had abated before beginning.

"Ladies and gentlemen, brother and sister dotters," he began, "as many of you may know, I ain't worth shucks at a speech. In fact, I don't know but what I would have backed plumb out o' this whole affair ef I had once thought a talk of any sort would be expected of me. It wasn't till you was all notified, an' *The New Clarion* was full of accounts of this convention, that Tom Sugart told me that the whole thing would fall as flat as a flitter ef I didn't rise an' say something at least in the way of welcome."

"Good, good, hurrah fer Tom!" exclaimed Peg-leg. "He not only knows how to git up a meal a mile long, but how to add on all the other up-to-date frills."

"Thank you, brother Wilson," Abner smiled. "You put the words in my mouth, an' exactly at the right place,

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fer before you all I want right now to thank Sugart for his excellent service. Ef it hadn't been fer Tom this would just 'a' been a common meal that we'd have been through with in ten minutes at the outside; but, as you see, we have set here constantly expectin' something to eat for fully two hours."

"An' gettin' plenty, too; don't leave that out, Uncle Ab," laughed the humorous interlocutor.

"Oh yes, an' gettin' all that could be expected, an' even more," Abner grinned. "I would propose drinkin' Tom's health, but I notice that the wonderful concoction that Frank Reymond mixed up in the big bowl is gone completely. Even the ladies seemed to take to it. It seemed to be sort o' straddle betwixt plain old untaxed moonshine an' mountain spring water that ought to be a future household necessity. As far as I see, it hain't done any of us a bit o' harm. I do notice that our brother Wilson, who passed his glass about as often as he could well manage it, is pretty lively; but fer all I know, that may be only natural. I noticed all of you down nigh his plate laughin' rather hearty, an' fer the benefit o' the folks up this way I will explain that the fun was all due to our brother meetin' with a little table accident. The most of us all acted with great wisdom an' consulted the bill to see what Tom had in the coffee-cups fer the first course, that looked like tea with grease floatin' on top, before we touched it; but Peg-leg Wilson, with his big brain an' merry mood, hain't got any more curiosity about new-fangled things than Socrates would have over a starched shirt an' standin' collar. A coffee-cup is a coffee-cup to brother Wilson, so while he was chattin' so glib with the charmin' lady on his left he reached over an' got the sugar-bowl an' put several lumps in his *boo—boo*—in his soup. No wonder you laughed down thar. Soup with sugar in it is too modern a mixture fer any of us. I'm not findin' fault with Peg-leg fer his lack of up-to-

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date notions, nuther, fer ef a prince of a royal house had been with us to-night he would 'a' been obliged to think them thick china cups contained what they was made fer. Of course, the saucer wasn't along with the cup, but it would be only natural fer anybody to think that with such a big crowd the supply of dishes might have run short."

"Thanks, Mr. Chairman," Wilson laughed out. "I'm glad you've explained my awkwardness in such a pleasant manner. I *did* put the sugar in, and, what was most surprising, I discovered that the stuff was really delightful to the taste. I'd advise you all to try it sometime. It was a great improvement, I assure you. Tom Sugart knows how to get up an endless-chain dinner, all right, and I'm goin' to write an article some day proposing to the Government that every condemned criminal, as a matter of pure humanitarian principle, be allowed to have his last earthly meal strung out like this one to-night. All sorts o' things could take place in his favor before a halt was called. He could grow from youth to old age, see whole countries wiped out in bloody carnage, and new ones spring up into activity and wane and die. No, the sugar in the soup is not bothering me, but I'm going to ask Tom in private some day what in the name of common sense he had that little chunk of yellow cheese alongside of every slice of apple-pie for. Out of pure curiosity I watched all the plates go back to the kitchen, and the cheese left on them, if it isn't hashed up into some dish for the transient trade and regular boarders, will feed the rats in this house for months to come."

When the laughter over this had subsided Abner resumed his address.

"I hardly know who is makin' this talk, me or my friend," he smiled; "but as long as he does as well as he is now, he kin keep on bustin' in. The cheese an' apple-pie mixture comes from Yankeedom, an' I don't blame any o' you dyed-in-the-wool Rebs fer not takin' to it.

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"Friends, as you all know, this newspaper business is a new thing to me. I got in it to help a powerful bright young man along, and my intention was to slide back to my farm an' have nothin' to do with it myself, but Howard simply won't have it that way; an', as it is the biggest fun I ever tackled, I shan't let loose. It looks like I can't, anyway, for folks come to me with all sorts of matters that I never thought of before an' which Howard really is too busy to handle. If anybody had told me that a newspaper man here in the mountains could have so many things to dabble in an' satisfy folks about I'd thought he was the boss liar from Liarsville.

"T'other day, fer instance, an old maid come to me all excited. She tuck me off in a corner of the office an' told me a great crisis had come in 'er uneventful life. She had been just a plain woman so far—never makin' any claims fer superiority in the community, an', as she said, even allowin' some of her most spiteful neighbors to brag to 'er face about the'r high ancestors, an' never dreamin' she had blue blood of 'er own. But she made a discovery. Thar was big excitement amongst all the women in town over the Daughters of the Revolution gettin' up a local chapter. She said she'd let these women sorter rub it in on her about bein' let into sech a select birthright organization, fer she hadn't had the slightest hope of ever doin' sech a thing 'erself; but she said that she wrote off to a genealogist in Virginia, givin' the name of her ancestor thar, an' lo and behold! when she got her answer back she was told that she really had two chances fer election. On her pa's side she was descended from a blacksmith that had been jest a common private in the ranks; but on her ma's side she had come straight down from a famous blue-blooded general who had a grant from the king to his property, an' so on. I've seen a lot o' pleased women in my day, but she was the most tickled one I ever run across. She wiggled like an eel while she

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talked. She told me how she had laid down 'er work, an' gone from house to house under this or that excuse showin' the letter an' seein' her enemies wilt in every instance, fer not a woman in town could claim to have fallen from sech a lofty perch. Among other things, she said she thought in the very nature o' the matter that she ort to be looked on as the leader of the entire local organization. But you are wonderin' what I was expected to do in the case. I'll tell you. She said she wasn't good at writin' up a thing, that she didn't know how to put in big words that make an article sound dignified, an' she wanted me to git up one fer our next issue about two columns long, with her picture and the general's at the top. She said that would actually lay out stiff an' stark some women off at a distance that she hadn't had a chance to git at. She was liberal, too; she said she wouldn't mind buyin', at the regular price, two or three copies of the paper to mark an' send to 'em. She said they was awfully stuck on the'rselves, an' it would do 'em good to know that a woman they had sniffed at so often was sech an angel in disguise, an' who might do some sniffin' 'erself the next time they met."

"I know the brand," Peg-leg here broke in, with a laugh. "We've got 'em out our way, too, brother Ab."

"Well, I shore was in a corner," Abner continued, with a smile. "Howard wasn't in, an' I hardly knowed how to git around it myself, fer the matter didn't seem to me to be suited fer our use. So I told 'er I'd study over it."

"All right," she said; "thar is a woman I hain't told yit that lives around the corner; I'll run in an' tease her a little an' be right back. I've got a good picture of myse'f that was tuck about twenty years ago that will have to do, because thar won't be time to wait fer a fresh one; an', as fer the general's picture, the histories is full of 'em—with his uniform on, at that—an' anybody can see that thar is a decided family likeness betwixt me an' him."

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"Well, when she was gone I set an' thought it all over, but couldn't decide what to do, an' I was expectin' 'er to bounce in on me every minute. Finally I happened to think of it an' picked up a United States history that happened to be lyin' 'round, an' turned back to what was said about the general. Gentlemen an' ladies—or, rather, ladies an' gentlemen, who can imagine my predicament? Thar it was in black an' white. The general was married, but he had never had a child, boy or gal, to his name. I had hardly recovered from this shock when in the-old maid bustled, laughin' hearty about how she had swatted the woman she had jest called on. She had found 'er at the cook-stove, an' the good tidin's knocked 'er over till she mighty nigh burnt 'erself. The old maid begun to give me additional items about her family to put in the write-up, but I gently broke in. I knowed I had to do it, an' the sooner the better. So I showed 'er the history an' watched 'er. She was plumb flabbergasted. At fust she swore history was wrong, then she set in to cry. After that she got mad at the genealogist that had writ such a lie to 'er to git 'er money, an' I was glad, fer I was afeard she'd hit me. Finally she wanted to know what she must do to git out o' the mess. I told 'er to slide into the 'Daughters' via the blacksmith; but this wouldn't do, fer she said Mrs. So-an'-so, who she hated worse than a rattlesnake, had rid in on the back of a carpenter, an' that she'd been pokin' fun at 'er over it. Besides, she said, who knows ef this genealogist is a liar about a general, he might be the same about a blacksmith, an' ef I failed on the blacksmith I *would* be in a fix. I saw 'er a few days later. She had solved the whole business. Her enemies was too green to read history, an' so couldn't know about the general's descendants, an' she was tellin' everybody that she could slide into the 'Daughters' as slick as goose grease, but that the whole thing was unpatriotic, an' as the only livin' descendant of a man

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who had fought fer human liberty, she felt it to be her bounden duty to discourage the whole movement."

"Oh, my hands are full, you kin bet your life," Abner went on, after the laugh had subsided. "That man Hillhouse is now a plumb hero to me, fer he has held the business down all his life. I couldn't tell you in a month o' Sundays all the funny things that have come to us already. Why, t'other day a man you'd never suspect of havin' sech a notion, fer he is hardly able to keep shoes on his feet, he's so poor—a widower as old as I am—wanted me to insert a' ad fer him ter git a wife, an' keep him out of it till he could make a choice. Ef any o' you ladies want his name I'll give it to you in private. He's got six children an' two grandchildren, all of 'em at work in a cotton-mill, an', as he said, they won't interfere with the bride or the honeymoon. He said the reason he didn't want to be knowed in the ad was that he wanted to git a look at the applicants—an' even talk to 'em ef possible, examine the'r credentials an' the like—before he come to a decision in the matter. He had been all over the country lookin' fer a bride, but thar had always been some'n' lackin'. Sometimes a woman would be young an' strong enough an' fill the bill in looks, but would fall short in education, birth, religious convictions, willin'-ness to work, or the money he thought would be necessary to make both of 'em plumb happy. I had to turn him down, as he wanted it on a credit—an' I hated to do it, because he had set his heart on the plan an' really couldn't see what was wrong with it."

"Send him over to Dogwood." Patty Quinn, a vivacious young woman, spoke up with a sarcastic smile. "The women over there will attend to his case. A bunch of them rode a lazy scamp on a rail awhile back and gave him a coat of tar and feathers. He'd been whippin' his wife—a poor little sickly thing. When they finished with

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him he looked like a storm-beaten buzzard that was glad to roost anywhere on earth."

In the laugh that rose over this remark Abner concluded his talk. He then called on Howard, who made a strong speech, outlining the policy of the paper and assuring the correspondents that he and Abner would look to them for the best support a rural weekly ever had. When Howard sat down Abner, with a mischievous smile in her direction, called on Miss Patty Quinn for a few words. This was greeted by loud applause; but that young lady refused to rise. She shook her head resolutely.

"Mr. Raymond tells me," she said, "that as soon as the speeches are over the tables are to be pushed back against the wall and we are to have dancing. I hear the fiddles tuning up now, and it makes my feet tingle. I have had a good time listening to you men, but I'd rather dance than talk myself, and as it is late I hope you will give us a chance."

Abner agreed with her, and he rose from the table, the others following him.

CHAPTER XVIII

IT was a hot Sunday afternoon. Howard was spending the day with his parents. Abner came over to see him about three o'clock, and they took a walk along the country road. They passed the cabin of Pole Baker, and saw their friend under a big oak in the yard swinging two of his younger children in a swing he had made.

"He's havin' a big time," Abner said, admiringly; "let's not call to 'im. He's got his faults, but they only seem to make 'im a better father at times. I've seed tears in his eyes when he talked about his children havin' just a stepmother. Ef anything in the world will make a man serious that will. The woman he got the last time is a good soul; but the children ain't her'n, an' I reckon ef she don't love 'em it ain't her fault. She's sorry she ain't had any of 'er own, but I reckon it is a good thing, considerin' Pole's careless habit with the bottle. The Lord knows he's got a big enough brood already."

"You and I haven't a truer friend anywhere," Howard replied. "He'd fight for either of us till he dropped in his tracks."

"Oh yes, that's a fact," Abner agreed, "an' I'd like to show appreciation of it if I knowed how; he's so all-fired sensitive an' touchy that he won't accept a thing. I've tried many a time. I put 'im on the free list to git the paper, and he went right off in a huff an' borrowed the money an' paid fer two years in advance."

Pole had seen them, and, calling loudly, he left the children and came across his cotton-field to join them at a bend in the road.

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"I was just lookin' fer you two chumps," he said, with a grin, as he burst through a patch of blackberry-vines and climbed over the rail fence. "I've got a treat fer you. Uncle Ab, yore watermelons failed this year. I looked at 'em as I passed yesterday; but Pole Baker's didn't, you bet yore life. I put a big one in my spring last night, an' by this time it is as cold as 'Greenland's Icy Mountain.' Come right on down thar. Ef you haven't a tooth fer a red-meated, thin-rind melon on a hot day like this something is wrong with your internal machinery."

The invitation was eagerly accepted, and, entering a shady wood on the left of the road, they soon found themselves on the brink of a great spring of clear mountain water. And there, in the shadiest nook, and overhung by long moss and fern-leaves, floated the melon. Picking up a stick, Pole drew it to the brink and lifted it out on the grass. A moment later he took out his long-bladed pocket-knife, and as he touched the point of the blade to the the rind he said:

"I'll show you some'n' peculiar about this rattlesnake brand o' watermelon. The skin ain't much thicker'n paper, an' the minute the blade goes in even jest a little ways the rind begins to crackle an' bust. It looks like the goody inside is swellin' an' tryin' to git out."

It was as Pole said; the melon seemed almost to open of its own accord, and great pink, frosty-looking slices soon lay before them.

"A banquet fit fer a king," Abner chuckled. "Ef I don't love 'em as much as a nigger it is because they steal 'em, an' my friends give 'em to me."

When the three had eaten all they wanted Abner took out some cigars and proffered them. Howard accepted, but Pole shook his head doubtfully. "I thought this was to be my treat all round," he protested. "I've got some cigars up at the cabin that I always keep fer special use,

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an' I 'lowed we'd walk back that way an' you could say howdy to my wife, fer she is fond o' little attentions like that. Boys, she's a good, steady woman, an' I'm shore I made no mistake marryin' her. Did I ever tell you about how it happened? It certainly was a thing I didn't count on at first."

"Oh, take a smoke." Abner still extended the cigar. "They don't cost me a red cent. Every advertiser in Darley chucks 'em at me to git my rate down. That is, everybody but Tarp. He knows how to fix the rate hisse'f, an' he manages it without throwin' out special inducements. But say, Pole," as Baker reluctantly took the cigar and began to pinch off the tip with his strong thumb-nail, "tell us about how you happened to git spliced the last time."

"It was a funny business." Pole lit his cigar at Howard's. "You both knowed Sally, my fust wife, an' you know what a good, tender mother she was; an' you know, too, how she put up with me in all my outlandish pranks and spreeds. Well, boys, when she was laid away after that short sickness, her last word showin' awful worry about leavin' the children jest with me, like I am, it made me stop an' think. As many know, I stayed at home more an' tried to keep sober. After the fust year all my kin got to tellin' me I jest had to find a step-mother of the right sort to care fer the children, an' right thar, boys, I had a purty sharp tussle that maybe you never thought of. The good Lord knows that I hain't any big prize in the marriage market, but in this day an' time any sort o' man in pants kin marry above hisse'f, an' I wasn't no exception. Amongst all the folks that was eternally dingdongin' at me to marry, pa was the worst. He'd married a third wife hisse'f, an', as he said, bettered hisse'f each time. He used to come over to my cabin at night after the children was all in bed an' set an' fuss an' fume about how sorry he was fer 'em. He not only nagged

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me hisse'f, but he put all the women in the neighborhood onto the job. I'd meet big bunches of 'em as I come out o' the meetin'-house, an' sometimes they'd head me off as I drove along the road on the way to town. They had one an' all agreed on Jane Cross bein' the thing to fill the bill. She'd never married, an' lived over at River-cove, a mile from me, all by 'erse'f in a cabin. She was forty-six, three years older 'n me, an', as pa an' the women said, had every right to a husband. Women will pity an old maid quicker'n they will a young frisky gal that knows how to cock 'er eyes an' suck dimples in 'er pink cheeks, an' I reckon that's what made 'em so eager to pair me an' Jane off. Well, between 'em all they got me on the run, an' one day I put on a clean shirt an' walked over to Jane's cabin, more to see how I'd feel about it than anything else. I found 'er out at the branch washin' clothes. It was a broilin' hot day, an' she was barefooted, had 'er sleeves rolled up above 'er elbows, an' was a-sloshin' away in the suds at a great rate. I don't know whether she'd heard of all the talk about me'n' her or not, but I'm goin' to tell you the plain, unvarnished truth, as I looked at 'er an' seed the wrinkles about 'er mouth an' the crow's-feet round 'er eyes I sorter hoped she hadn't. I remember I tried to pretend that I was jest passin'—though I reckon the clean shirt may have made 'er suspicious that some'n' else was in my mind. Anyways, I didn't propose. It was late when I got home. Pa had seed the direction I took, an' my biggest gal, Sally, had told 'im about the dirty shirt I'd throwed in a corner an' the Sunday one I'd took out o' the drawer, an' so he was at the gate waitin' fer me, as impatient as a boy to open a pack o' fire-crackers Christmas mornin', when all the rest are shootin' 'em off around 'im. He'd fed my pigs, an' curried an' rubbed down a fine mare I owned at that time, an' done all my home work, even splittin' an' totin' in the wood fer Sally to

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cook supper with. He wouldn't let me go in the house till I told 'im the news.

"'What did she say?' he axed me. 'Out with it, Pole, I know whar you been. You can't fool me.'

"I tried to joke it off, but he got madder an' madder an' begun to cuss. Then I got my dander up. I fired back, an' told 'im I hadn't mentioned the matter to Jane, an' wasn't sure that I ever would. La, you could 'a' heard 'im a mile—he cussed a blue streak. I was the vilest dog that ever sucked eggs. The Almighty had put Jane in my path. Her equal wasn't to be found on earth. She wasn't much to look at, but she was puore gold, an' a sight too good fer a whisky-swiggin' hobo like me. He told me ef I didn't go an' fix it up that he'd cut a hickory and larrup my back till the blood run. Of course, I knowed that was all talk; in fact, he tried to whip me once after I was full grown. I ketched 'im an' throwed 'im down an' helt 'im thar till he begged to be let up. Nevertheless, after he went home that night, an' I looked at my bunch o' children around the supper-table, I admit the idea o' Jane bein' in charge of 'em wasn't so bad."

"I should think not," Abner broke in, quite interested in the recital. "So you fixed it up?"

"Not right off, Uncle Ab," Pole smiled, half sheepishly. "You boys are my best friends, an' I'm goin' to be plain with you. I'm jest human—human to the backbone, an' some'n' tuck place that come powerful nigh partin' me an' Jane forever. About that time I had a little business in Atlanta. Telfair and Jones, over in Darley, shipped a car o' hogs down thar, an' wanted me to run down an' see that they was fed an' unloaded at the stock-yard an' received in good shape by the fellers orderin' 'em. I'd got the business off my hands, an' was walkin' about the city thinkin' about comin' back on the next train, when I happened to meet my old schoolmate, Jeff

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Sanderson, who was at work in the switch-yard inspectin' cars an' keepin' track of 'em. He was awfully glad to see me, an' jest made me go to his house an' spend the day an' night with 'im. His wife was powerful friendly, an' they made me feel plumb at home. Now, I'm comin' down to brass tacks. I don't think a man ort to be ashamed of any natural feelin' he has, for I believe everything comes from on high, an' I'm goin' to confess that when I laid eyes on Annie, Jeff's oldest gal, I had the oddest feelin's a feller ever had shoot through 'im. She was barely past seventeen, but was full grown, an', boys, I'm here to state that she was simply the sweetest, purtiest little trick that ever wore shoe-leather. Thar had been a good deal o' talk, I afterward learned, betwixt Jeff an' his wife about me bein' on the lookout fer a wife, an' Annie had heard it. I hope you won't think I'm stuck on myse'f, fer I know my faults as well as you or anybody else; but I was all shaved up an' in my best duds, an' didn't look anything like I did here at home in my knockabout clothes, an' Jeff had give me jest a long-enough swig out o' the family flask to make me feel my oats. In fact, both him an' his wife seemed to be worried about their big expenses, an' it looked like they was willin' fer me to take Annie off their hands. I know that they slid off to bed early that night an' left me an' her together. Boys, boys, boys! Scriptur' says some'r's that you kin be born ag'in, an' I reckon it is so, fer as I sat thar in that lamplight an' saw the long lashes of that purty gal droopin' over the finest eyes I ever looked in, an' heard 'er sweet young voice quiver when she spoke, all my troubles was swept away, an' jest me an' her was thar like we was floatin' on some sort of a cloud. Well, well, Uncle Ab, a man can't live as long as I have lived an' not know a few things. I knowed as well as I knowed I had hands an' feet hooked on to me that I could take that sweet little thing home with me. I knowed it, an'

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yit I helt in. I didn't say nothin', but next day after I said good-by to Jeff an' his wife, an' Annie went as far as the street-corner with me to point out the right car, I was sure I'd come back to see 'er ag'in."

"I see, you *was* in a pickle, wasn't you?" Abner said, sympathetically.

"I was, an' no mistake," Baker resumed, with a smile. "An' on the train goin' home I was in the awfulest stew I ever was in. Part o' the time I was happy, an' part o' the time I was worryin'. Some'n' told me, boys, that no matter what Jeff an' his wife was willin' to do, that at my age, an' with my children an' habits, I had no right to take advantage of that little gal. I said to myse'f that ef I'd stay away from 'er an' marry Jane that Annie might run across some young feller that would do more fer 'er in the long run than I could. But, on the other hand, it was like pullin' eye-teeth to give 'er up. Well, to hurry on, when I got home the next evenin', an' pa come over as usual to take up his old song an' dance, I'd plumb made up my mind that I was runnin' the business an' that I was simply goin' back to git that gal. Wise or otherwise, she was to be mine. So, you see, that bein' the situation, it sorter made me mad to hear pa start in ag'in on his long harangue. I listened awhile, an' then I up an' told 'im about Annie an' what I'd decided to do. He'd seed the gal about a year before at a meetin' of the Confederate Veterans over in Gainsville, when she was in short dresses, an' you kin imagine how what I said struck 'im. He ripped an' he snorted. He walked up an' down in the yard an' cussed an' cussed an' cussed. Then he set in to threaten. Pa is a big believer in the Lord inflictin' wrong-doers with all sorts o' misfortunes, an' he said that ef I did sech a fool thing the Almighty's hand would fall on me good an' hard. I'd never have a single day o' good luck. Nothin' but misfortune after misfortune would come, fer I'd been duly warned an' had had time

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to reflect over the crime I was about to commit. I got hot an' ordered the old chap away, an' he went off as nigh crazy as a sane man can be. At the gate he turned back an' called out, 'See ef I ain't right—see ef you don't have bad luck even fer goin' as fer in this foolishness as you have!'

"Boys, I reckon sech notions are handed down from father to son, fer I give you my word somehow I begun to be afeard that some misfortune really might come. Still, I was determined to git that gal. The more I thought of 'er the more I wanted 'er. The next day I set down to write Annie a letter. I had jest started it when Sally come in an' said she thought my fine mare was actin' strange out in the lot. I dropped everything an' went to look. The mare was sick. She'd eat some'n' that went agin 'er. She was lyin' down an' refused to git up. I tried every remedy I knowed, but she only got worse, an' finally she stretched out an' died.

"'Uh-hughn!' I said to myself, 'the old man may be right. This is a warnin'.' An' that evenin' pa heard about the mare, an' come past my door an' peeked in. 'What did I tell you?' he axed, with one o' his sneakin' grins. 'You keep on, an' worse still will come.'"

"So that turned you square about," Abner remarked.

"No, it didn't," Pole smiled. "I got to thinkin' it over, an' said to hell with the warnin'. I was goin' to marry that gal, luck or no luck. So about two days later I went to Darley in my best clothes. I was short o' funds, but I went to a friend that never had turned me down an' told 'im I was goin' by the next train to Atlanta an' axed 'im to lend me twenty dollars. He didn't have it in his pocket, but promised to git it up fer me. He had trouble borrowin' it, an' when he got back the train was just startin'. Grabbin' the money, I made a wild dash fer the depot. As I got in sight of the train it was jest turnin' the curve at the end o' the street. I saw ef I

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caught it I'd have to run like the devil. I did my best, an' might have hung on to the last car, but I come to a wide ditch. I tried to jump it, but missed my mark an' fell on the rocks about ten feet below an' skinned my knee-cap purty bad. An' when I'd crawled out all splattered with mud, the train was plumb out o' sight.

"'Uh-hughn!' I said, rememberin' pa's talk, 'this is the *second* warnin'. Fust it is a fine mare, next it is a sore knee; ef I keep this thing up maybe I'll git my damn' neck broke.'"

"I see," Abner laughed. "Fate shorely seemed agin you; not that I place store in sech things, though."

"Well, I did that day, anyway," Pole said, gravely. "Thar was another train at midnight, an' havin' the money in my pocket to go on, the old Nick hisse'f possessed me. I set around the hotel an' thought about Annie till I was in a regular fever to see 'er an' fix it up. But what do you reckon? About eight o'clock the news come by telegraph that the train I had missed had run off a trestle nigh Atlanta, an' killed about twenty passengers an' wounded a sight more.

"'Uh-hughn!' I said, an' I went out an' struck a bee-line fer home. I was all worked up over it, an' scared powerful. I got afeard that when I got home I'd find something wrong. One o' the children might be sick or the house in ashes. So when I got home an' saw the cabin all dark an' quiet I leaned on the fence and thanked the Lord fer His mercy. I went in an' got in the bed with the two youngest an' hugged 'em close an' prayed over 'em. I got ashamed, too, fer I set in to thinkin' about how silly it would look fer my oldest gal to have a step-mother every bit an' grain as young as she was, an' the other children to have sech an inexperienced person over 'em. Oh, I was in an awful stew! I wrestled with the devil that night as hard as any of the old Bible chaps did. Me 'n' him had it tooth an' toe. One minute he'd be on

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top, an' the next I'd have him under me. All at once I remembered an old text, an' ordered 'im to git behind me. Boys, that's *one* prayer that I fully believe was answered, an' it is strange that it was addressed to the devil. He hopped back like a nigger at a white man's picnic, an' I begun to see clear. The children was all sound asleep, an' I got up an' put on my clothes an' slipped out. One minute I was tellin' the devil to keep whar he belonged, an' the next I was beggin' the Lord, as I looked up at the stars, to lead me on. After a while I got to Jane's cabin. She was in bed. She kept a dog, an' he growled under the porch; but as soon as I spoke to 'im he come out an' wagged his tail an' cavorted about very friendly.

"Uh-hughn!" I said, 'good luck at last, an' from a yaller dog!'

"I was about to knock at the door when Jane woke up an' called out: 'Who's thar?'

"'Me,' I said, 'Pole Baker. Throw on some'n' quick, Jane Cross, an' open the door. I want to speak to you, an' I'm in a great hurry.'

"I heard her fumblin' about inside, stumpin' 'er toes an' striking matches. Purty soon she come to the door in 'er stockin'-feet with an old shawl twisted over 'er head. She was powerful excited.

"'What's wrong?' says she. 'Anybody sick?' She was a great hand to be called out at night—in big demand with high an' low in time of trouble, an' that was one reason so many was lookin' after her interests. I hardly knowed how to begin; but as we stood thar an' she was shiverin' from the cool night air, somehow she seemed to me to be the very best woman in the world.

"'Nobody hain't sick,' I said. 'But I'm worried, Jane. You love children, an' are kind to 'em. Mine hain't got no mother, an' I want you to marry me the fust thing in the mornin'. I'm comin' for you

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in a buggy, an' you got to oblige me—this time, anyway.'"

"Straight talk"—Abner nodded to both the others—"and about as good a plan as any. Fellers talk pretty sharp to their wives after they been married a few months, anyway, so why not set in on a business basis at once? What did Jane say?"

"She was powerfully astonished," Pole answered. "She hemmed an' hawed an' made all manner of excuses—one thing she said was that she'd always thought folks ort to make love awhile before a step like that—but whenever I'd speak about the children I noticed that she'd waver. So I hammered on that line fer a good hour. Finally she agreed, an' I went off an' left 'er. Boys, I felt better. As I walked home in the starlight I knowed I had acted wise almost fer the fust time in my life. I passed pa's house, an' stopped an' leaned on the gate. Then I called out loud, an' he got out o' bed an' opened the door.

"'I jest wanted to tell you,' said I, 'that me'n' Jane is goin' to git married to-morrow.'

"'Is it all plumb fixed up?' he axed.

"'Yes, it's all fixed,' I said, an' I seed 'im turn back in the house to tell my stepmother the news."

CHAPTER XIX

AS Abner and Howard were walking homeward together the sun was going down. They were near Tinsley's gate when Howard remarked that his mother was expecting Abner to take supper and spend the evening with them.

"Well, I will stop," Abner said; "an' some'n' is goin' to happen at yore house to-night that never has took place while I was thar."

"What is that?" Howard asked, with a slow smile of amusement at his old friend's tone.

"Why, I don't intend to let yore pa draw me into a religious argument. He may say he has authority for the belief that the whole round earth an' all the stars is now revolvin' in the belly of a big whale, an' I won't deny it."

"You will find that he has changed a good deal," Howard returned. "He seems to be less aggressive than he was."

After supper that night, as Abner happened to be smoking on the porch alone, Mrs. Tinsley came out and joined him. A certain embarrassment seemed to rest on her as she folded and nervously stroked her hands under her white apron and leaned on the balustrade.

"I hain't never had a chance to tell you—" she began, but her voice grew husky and failed her.

"To tell me what?" Abner inquired, gently.

"I've been layin' off to tell you—I started several times to *write*; but here of late my hands shake—I'm

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ashamed of my writin'—but I can't put it off any longer. I must tell you how I feel—about—about what you've done. You ort to know it all. You saved me from misery untold. I was weak, wavery, an' plumb desperate. If you'd let my boy go away when he planned it I'd have left Hiram, an' no tellin' what would have happened to me, myself. But—but with yore good heart, far-seein' mind, and self-sacrifice you changed it all. Hiram is different, it seems to me. In fact, I pity 'im some. It may be that I was seein' wrong, owin' to the torture I was in. I don't know, but I am happy fer the fust time in many a year. I'm a happy woman, Abner Daniel, an' I owe it all to you."

Turning suddenly, and with a hand on her lips, as if to suppress rising emotion, she walked into the house. Abner rose to detain her, but she was gone.

The next morning as Howard was walking to town he passed the gate of a rather pretentious farm-house only a short distance beyond Trumbley's. It was owned and occupied by Frederic Craig, a middle-aged bachelor, who was noted for his overbearing manner, dissolute habits, and addiction to strong drink.

When quite near Howard saw Craig leading a horse toward the gate, and noticed that his face was flushed, as it always was when he was intoxicated. Bowing, Howard was passing on, when Craig leaned on the fence and called out, roughly:

"Hold on there; I want to see you!"

Pausing, Howard said, "What is it, Craig?"

With his dark eyes flashing angrily, the color rising into his bald pate, and a hand flourishing a riding-whip in a threatening manner, Craig blurted out:

"I want to know one thing, an' I want to know it right now on this spot. Did you know that my paper was stopped?"

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"Yes, I knew it. I have entire charge of the subscription list," Howard answered, scenting a difficulty, and yet fearless, even angered by the man's tone.

"Then *you* did it, damn you!" fumed the other. "What did you take my name off for?"

"Because you owe for three years' subscription to the old paper and have not paid up," Howard retorted. "We are entirely within our rights, Craig. We notified you—sent the account to you, and you insulted the bearer."

"You are afraid you won't get it, are you?" Craig demanded, fiercely. "Do you know what I have a good mind to do, you young upstart? I have a good mind to walk out there and give you a sound licking."

Furiously angry, Howard stepped close to him and glared into the bloated face. "The gate is near," he said, calmly. "Come outside and let's settle it now. You are drunk, but I won't take anything off of you, nevertheless. You bully everybody, but you can't bully me, Craig."

"You say—you dare to—to talk that way to me," Craig blustered, making no movement, however, toward the gate. "You, you—"

There was a sound in the thicket across the road, and Pole Baker suddenly emerged, a stare of surprise in his kindly eyes. "Hold, hold! What's this?" he cried. Then, taking Howard by the arm, he said: "Come along. Let 'im alone. He's drunk, an' don't know his hat from a hole in the ground. You don't want to have to kill a waddlin' baby. Say, Craig, take yore hand out o' yore pocket. You've got a gun—you are jest cowardly enough to tote one all the time; but ef you draw it I'll tear down a panel o' this fence an' beat the life out o' you. This is a friend o' mine, an' what he does goes, an' don't you forget it."

"The young whelp dares to—"

"Dry up!" Pole rested an enormous hand on one of

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the upright palings. "Dry up, ef you know what's good fer you. You owe 'im money, as you owe everybody else in the county, an' you are too lordly to swallow a justifiable dun. Come on, Howard. He don't know what he's sayin'."

Craig, muttering threats, lowered his head to the fence, and Howard, furious and reluctant, allowed Pole to draw him away. For some distance they walked side by side in silence. They were near the town before either spoke. Pole broke the silence.

"Say, Howard, my friend," he began, "the Lord knows I'm a purty thing to advise you after all the shoot-in' scrapes I've been in, but I hope you'll let this thing slide out o' mind. I know you purty well. You've got a high temper, an' you are burnin' from head to foot right now. It will be like you to let this rankle an' fester till maybe serious trouble may come out of it."

"He'll simply have to take back what he said just now," Howard answered, his lips white and quivering. "When he is sober I shall face him an' remind him of the whole thing, and then if he—"

"Tut, tut!" exclaimed Pole. "Wipe it out o' mind. He's a bad man an' not responsible. He don't care whether he lives or dies. Somebody will have to kill 'im, but it mustn't be you. Trouble o' that sort has ruined many a promisin' young life, an' you can't afford to blight yore prospects fer a worthless scamp like him. He makes enemies of everybody he deals with. He can't hire men to work for 'im. He's ruined a dozen good lives."

Howard said nothing, but Pole saw that his anger had not abated in the slightest.

"I know how you are—oh, I know!" Pole sighed. "Sometimes nothin' but a fight to a finish will cool a fellow off, but I hope Craig will have sense enough to keep out o' yore way. You are both hot-tempered."

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Ef Craig knowed you as well as I do he would have helt his lip jest now."

When Pole met Abner on the street that morning and told him of the circumstances Abner's face grew grave. "I was wondering what was wrong," he said. "I knowed some'n' had happened an' understand now. Say, Pole, we must try to keep 'em apart. Howard has a dangerous look in his eye."

CHAPTER XX

ON the following afternoon, when Abner returned from luncheon, Howard informed him that Tarp had just been in to see him. "It is about some advertising scheme," Howard added, with a significant smile. "He wanted to see you personally about the rate, I think."

"Why didn't *you* attend to it?" Abner asked. "You know a sight more about sech things than a farm-hand like me."

"I tried to," Howard answered; "but he said he preferred to get the terms from you."

"Do you know why?" Abner asked, with a sickly grin. "Ef you don't I do. You remember how he soaked me the last time with his high palaver. He thinks I am the hungriest sucker that ever swam in new waters. Bein' sold once is a plenty fer me. Tarp 'll find me with my eyes peeled an' skinned for every move he makes. Is he comin' in ag'in?"

"No, he said he was too busy at the store. He wants you to run in there for a minute. He has the matter ready for printing, and the rate is the only thing to be agreed on."

Abner had hung his hat up on its nail, but he took it down. "I wish it was a hoss trade," he sighed. "I'm as good as the next one at that; but one thing is certain, an' that is ef that skunk gits another ad out o' me at half price I'll make 'im a present o' the paper. He's got to pay our schedule rates. All his gab about bein' the main advertiser in town won't go down. I'll go right now an' have it over with."

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Abner found the lively young merchant without his coat superintending the unpacking of several enormous cases of notions on the front sidewalk. Great stacks of hosiery in bundles and boxes, neckties, and suspenders were being piled against the show-windows on the outside.

"Leave 'em that way till closin'-time," Tarp ordered the young men who were unpacking. "Let the folks passing by see what quantities we buy. Don't sell any, though. Tell everybody they are bein' held for the big anniversary sale day after to-morrow to open at ten sharp. Besides, they've got to be checked off the bill and marked."

"Did you want to see me, J. L.?" Abner asked, as he caught Tarp's upward glance from a big case which the merchant had just burst open with a hatchet and nail-drawer.

"See you?" Tarp stared blandly. "Oh yes, I remember now. I was down to see you. Why the devil don't you stay about yore shack? I had a minute to spare as I was hustling by for my dinner, but you were not in, an' you can see for yourself the fix I am in. Look inside the store; both them counters is lined by folks anxious to be waited on. They come to me from the corners of three different states. Listen at that racket. Uncle Ab, I hear that hum after I git to sleep at night. It is a regular pandemonium, but I like it. It seems to be in my blood, you know."

"You wanted to see me about a' ad," Abner suggested, to save time.

"Yes, that was it," Tarp admitted, as he left the front and led Abner back into the store. "We can settle it in a minute. I've got the stuff already written out. Look at that bunch of greenhorns at the show-case, Uncle Ab; they don't know which way to turn. I need an expert floor-walker to direct my customers about. People here

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in the backwoods would stare in wonder, wouldn't they? Huh! all the gals in town would be in love with him. But if this thing keeps expanding as it is I'll need several, as well as the cash-delivery system. I was inspecting a fine thing in that line the other day. The only trouble is installing it in an old-fashioned house like this. The agent admitted that the ceiling is too low. I may have to use cash-boys instead, but they are no earthly good; they want to play half the time. I tried to train in four of them last Saturday for the rush, and they got to fighting with some pillows and scattered feathers all over the dress-goods department. Uncle Ab, I want to introduce you to Miss Bessie Williams, my new milliner. She's back in her department trimming hats. She's a corker, always lived in a big city till now. I got her by accident. For a year I've been on the lookout for just the right person, but couldn't come across one till I heard of Miss Bessie through a straw-hat drummer. She had a temporary job in Atlanta, and I went down to look her over. I took her out to a show and had supper with her at the Kimball House. Gee! you ought to have seen the togs she wore. Folks all around was looking at us. She will be a walking ad in this town, I tell you. All day yesterday she was ordering fresh stock for her department, and Bliss, Hornaday & Co.'s man, that was here with ten sample trunks, said she took the lead in good judgment over any milliner he had met south of Mason and Dixon's line."

"I reckon he thought she had good judgment in buyin' from *him*," Abner ventured, with one of his misleading smiles. "I believe I won't be introduced right now, bein' as you are rushed an' I must git back to the office. How about that ad?"

"Oh yes, I see," Tarp said, with a thoughtful frown. "It is this way, Uncle Ab. What is your regular rate for locals by the line to the *hoi-polloi*—the little scrub adver-

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tiser that just sticks in a few bits now and then in between the regular reading-matter?"

"We've just got one rate to the hoity-toity or any other folks," Abner jested, with twinkling eyes. "Ten cents a line to all—first come, first served."

"But *this* is different," Tarp protested. "Now, Uncle Ab, you've got to have common judgment and discrimination. I have to, myself. Why, scores o' little cross-roads storekeepers come in here an' get a wholesale rate on the stuff that I sell to my regular trade fer much more. Now listen good and don't bite off yore nose to spite yore face. The other night, as I set in my room, a notion come to me fer a long ad in the shape of reading-matter that would take up about two columns in yore paper, and I jotted it down before I went to bed. It is like a story, and yet it *ain't* a story. I'd read it to you if I had time. It will make everybody laugh fit to split their sides, it is so funny. In fact, you'd have to pay well to get such a thing composed for you. The only ad I've got in it is 'Tarp's Dry-goods and General Merchandise Emporium' like a crack of a whip at the end, and I'll have to get a wholesale price on it or we can't dicker."

"Ten cents a line is our fixed rate," Abner answered, firmly, a reminiscent shadow in his eyes, "an' I won't agree to any other."

"Well, you are a moss-back editor, then, Uncle Ab—you sure are; for this is a big job, and you will lose a chunk of money if you turn it down. I figured that three cents a line would be as high as I could go."

"You'll have to figure some more," Abner answered. "I'm goin' to make a livin' profit down thar or I'll go back to farmin'."

"So you refuse my offer?" Tarp said, with a fallen countenance. "I'll have to tear the dang thing up, then, an' it is the best idea that I ever put on paper."

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"Ten cents a line, an' no less, even ef you filled the whole local page," was Abner's half-irritated ultimatum.

"Well, it is off, then," Tarp declared. "You'll regret it, Uncle Ab. I'm a big advertiser, an' a great help to a home paper."

"I remember what a help you was the last time," Abner said to himself, as he left the store with a stride that was all but indignant.

When Abner was gone Tarp walked slowly back to his desk, and with a frown of disappointment took several sheets of manuscript from a drawer. While he was reading them a clerk came.

"Fred wants to know what to do about the case of piece goods that the railroad hasn't delivered yet," he said.

"Put in a claim for it," Tarp answered, crustily. "It is the only way to make them trace lost stuff. Say, Dick, don't bother me any more. When you see me down at the front you can ask me questions, but when I'm at my desk like this I want to be quiet."

Alone again, Tarp turned the pages of his manuscript and continued to frown. "I can't afford to destroy as good a thing as this," he said. "It is a bang-up good idea. I never saw a better one in any paper, if I do say it. Uncle Ab's a fool to lose it."

Tarp lowered his head to his hand and fell into deep reflection. Suddenly he started and looked up, a smile on his face, a gleam in his eyes. "Gee!" he exclaimed, aloud, "it might go through with a man that's as new in the newspaper business as he is, and if it did wouldn't I have a joke on him? Let's see; I'd only have to rewrite the first and last pages and sign a name of some sort to the end. I could get a friend over the mountain to mail it to him. By gum! I'll try it. Old Ab may see through it, and he may not. If he don't he's my meat. Lean and lank as he is, I'll eat him whole. Look out, old

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man, J. L. Tarp is on your track. You may see the day that you'll wish you'd taken up that three-cents-a-line proposition. If this passes muster folks will hear of Tarp's Dry-goods and General Merchandise Emporium five hundred miles away. Gee! I must get to work on it. He mustn't smell a rat, and he is hard to fool."

CHAPTER XXI

EARLY in the morning two days later Tarp left his "Emporium" by the front door and crossed the street to the post-office, the mail having just arrived from the rural routes. The post-office was in the rear of a long building, the front part of which was used as a drug store. Going to his lock-box, the merchant took out some letters and circulars. One of the letters which he read, as he leaned on a cigar-case near a front window, ran as follows:

ELKTOWN, *Wednesday*, 9 A.M.

DEAR J. L.,—I received the manuscript and your note, and at once put the manuscript in a fresh envelope and directed it to the Editor of *The New Clarion*. Moreover, I mailed it myself. I stood by and saw the postmaster drop it in the bag going to Darley. It will reach your man when this gets to you. I hope it will work. I know you of old.

"So far, so good," Tarp chuckled. "Now for the next move."

He had not long to wait, for Abner Daniel soon sauntered in, a bunch of keys in his hands, and, nodding to the merchant and some other by-standers, he passed on to his lock-box. Tarp had opened a dry-goods circular which had just come, and above its margin he furtively watched his intended prey. Abner was taking out of the large drawer set aside for *The New Clarion's* ponderous exchange numerous parcels and letters and stacking them up on his arm.

"I reckon I'd better not let the old chap see me right

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now," Tarp reflected, and therewith he turned away and walked down to the entrance of the hotel, where he paused, his expectant eyes on the door of the post-office. His vigilance was rewarded, for a moment later he saw Abner emerge, his face buried in some sheets of foolscap which had a familiar look to the watcher. Abner's face wore a startled, even triumphant expression, comparable to that on the face of a miner who has struck gold and decided to say little about it.

"Good, good—couldn't be better!" Tarp said to himself. "He's swallowin' it like a hungry fish. If this thing goes through it will be the talk of the county. Say, Uncle Ab, did you ever in your rounds happen to meet a chap by the name o' J. L. Tarp, proprietor of Tarp's Dry-goods and General Merchandise Emporium at Darley? Well, if you haven't you'd better keep your eye peeled. He's the slickest and the cheapest advertiser in seven states, and will do you if he can." And with an exultant smile the merchant turned into his store.

Abner finished reading the communication just received at the foot of the stairs and then went up to the office. Throwing his armful of papers on a table, he glanced across the room at Howard, who was at work on an editorial.

"Say," he began, smiling significantly, "you was sayin' you was afeard that we'd run a little shy on news fer to-morrow's issue, wasn't you?"

"I thought so," Howard returned, "but I guess we can manage to fill up by running some reserve matter already in type."

"We won't have to," Abner smiled, as he tapped on the table with the folded sheets he had received.

"Why? Has something happened?" Howard asked, curiously.

"You'll think so," Abner chuckled. "We've got a new correspondent over the mountains at Elktown—Thomas

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L. Keith he signs hisse'f, an' he's a corker, ef I am any judge. Drop that work an' listen to this."

Howard turned in his seat; and opening the manuscript and clearing his throat, Abner began to read in a sort of declamatory tone, which he used when he wished to be impressive:

"ELKTOWN, GA., *Wednesday Morning.*

"*Editor The New Clarion:*

"DEAR SIR,—I am writing to you with the hope that I may be enrolled as your correspondent from this charming mountain hamlet. I have never tried my hand at newspaper work, but I have always felt that I would like it as a pastime, and after reading about what a princely host you were at your recent dinner to the rural correspondents of *The New Clarion*, and what a gay time you all had in such a brotherly and sisterly way, I admit I have had the pen-fever worse than ever. And as for a suitable outlet for my efforts, I must say, without any intention to flatter, that I know of no journal that I would rather be a contributor to than yours. That such a well-printed, well-edited paper could emanate from a small town in north Georgia in these days of struggle is a marvel that I find difficulty to adjust myself to.

"Fine, ain't it?" Abner paused to comment and spit. "He knows what's what, ef I'm a proper judge, an' I'm glad sech a feller appreciates what we are doin'. But jest wait—that's jest the introduction to the main stuff. That's comin', as you'll see in a minute.

"I am happy to say, Mr. Editor [Abner resumed reading], that it happens now that I am able to transmit some important news—news, it seems to me at this distance, to be of unusual interest to people of all ages, sizes, classes, and sexes. Something of an astonishing nature has just come to light here in these quiet old mountains, and the excitement is absolutely unprecedented, and is spreading like a swollen torrent of water.

"It started from an old report that has been whispered and talked and hinted at ever since the last Cherokee Indian tribe lived here and was finally run off by our early settlers to the West. As you and your esteemed readers are doubtless aware, it is a fact

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of history and present-day observation that those same Indians dug gold with considerable success all around Elktown, as is proved by the old pits and shafts which still greet the eye in many spots. Now that fact is not only established beyond a peradventure by what has just come to light, but, moreover, the old story about a certain Indian chieftain burying a big treasure of nugget gold appears to have had actual foundation, as you will see by what follows.

"The old tales had died out; folks were going about their various affairs in their daily walks, never dreaming of the bomb of untold wealth that was to explode in our sylvan midst, when a stranger arrived from the Indian Territory and put up at the Elktown Hotel. He had no particular business that anybody could see, but kept coming and going and saying nothing to anybody. Some thought he was an agent sent out to buy up lumberlands for some rich company or inspect water-power plants, and there was no little interest in that view, for most of our citizens scented a rise in property values and maybe a coming railroad or two. But as the man continued to stay and act secretive in the extreme, the speculation as to what he was up to became rife. For one thing the stranger had an odd look. He was as dark as a mulatto, had very high, if not actually protruding cheek-bones, was remarkably tall, as straight as a ramrod, and had hair as thick and stiff as number eight spool-thread. Now, to shorten a tale which may be proving wearisome to some of your valued readers, the stranger seemed to have accomplished his purpose. Many noticed that he looked happy. In fact, folks on the watch caught him grinning to himself when he thought nobody was looking. He paid his bill; in fact, made lavish tips all about. He had packed up his belongings and was waiting for the train to take him off when he suddenly fell sick. Some folks think he overate on some ripe peaches, which are plentiful here right now (of the clear-stone variety, for which our valley is justly famous), and others claim that he acted like a man with a weak heart. Be that as it may, he rolled and tumbled in his bed, to which he had been conducted, and was partly out of his head. The amiable proprietor of the Elktown Hotel and his kind-hearted and popular wife tried to attend to his needs as well as they could, and it appears that they overheard him saying things not intended for other ears than his own. He seemed to be afraid that the hand

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of the Grim Reaper was overshadowing him, and was anxious to get something of vast importance off his mind, and at the same time to be aware that none but his own chosen people could be received into his confidence. He kept saying: 'Gold! Gold! Gold! Chunks and chunks of it! Under the mossy rock—keep to the right! Go down hill to stream, then left up the slope and down again to gum spring. Then on over the fallen oak to young hickory with blazed side facing the setting sun,' and a lot more that was not remembered accurately in all the excitement. The man died at break of day, just as the first pink tints of dawn were spreading over the land where his forefathers hunted primeval bear and deer with the bow and flint-tipped arrow.

"There was nothing to do but lay him away in as decent a form as was possible. Nobody could guess what religion, if any, he had; and so no particular denomination officiated, though all was represented at an impressive ceremony at the tomb. Nobody knewed [the pronunciation was Abner's, interpolated in his excitement] where the deceased lived, and so his friends and relatives could not be notified; but they were evidently on the watch as to his movements. Whether it was something he had written back to his folks, or his failure to write, can only be surmised. It was a fact, though, that within ten days after the interment two well-dressed, dark-skinned men with the same high cheekbones and other facial blemishes and straight backs came and put up at the hotel. They could not hide the excitement they were in. They spent the days nosing about in the mountains and the nights confabbing together in their room. Sometimes they would get the proprietor of the hotel to tell them exactly what the dead man had mumbled in his delirium; but that did not seem to furnish the desired clue to what they were after, and they showed great and unprecedented chagrin in consequence.

"As you and your gentle readers may well imagine, the whole matter got in a ferment in the neighborhood. Nothing else was talked of at the fireside, in the field, office, or place of business. Not a man, woman, nor child in this section doubted that the old buried-treasure story was a fact, and that the dead man had somehow acquired knowledge of it and successfully located the gold. But what good was that to do when the only lips that could reveal the full truth were hermetically sealed forever?

"The Indian fellows that had come seemed to give up, or pre-

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tended to give up, for they went their way as silently and mysteriously as they had arrived. But what happened after they left? With all the lynx-eyed ability of their forefathers they had overlooked a thing that a little boy, the twelve-year-old son of one of our most highly esteemed farmers, discovered by bare accident when he had his pa's shotgun out hunting yesterday. He ran across a big, flat-sided boulder of gray limestone a mile or so from town facing due east. On it were some letters that had evidently been made by the dead man with a brush and oil-paint. They were fully six inches in size, and, while washed with the plenteous rains which have recently fallen, were distinctly discernible. They were:

"T. D. G. A. G. M. E. 85. M. S. D.

"The boy happened to relate his discovery to his pa in the presence of our esteemed town clerk and others, and you may well imagine the excitement thus promulgated. Needless to say, the spot was promptly visited by everybody who could possibly climb the rugged steeps and cross the yawning cañons intervening between Elktown and that interesting goal. Your correspondent happened to be among the first to view with his own eyes the discovery, and he, for one, makes bold to say positively that the dying stranger who passed into the vast Unknown with sealed lips with his own hand painted the letters on the rock as a landmark to guide him back to the hidden treasure.

"Such excitement has never been known since Lee's surrender. It seems to be understood that the first person to interpret or translate the mystic letters will be the unmolested owner of untold wealth. Thousands of guesses are being made, but the wisest are keeping their notions to themselves. Your correspondent, himself, is reasonably sure that he knows exactly what the letters stand for, but he reserves the right, along with the rest, of making no disclosure at this writing. Perhaps in my next letter I may see my way to publishing my solution of the enigma.

"I would add a few local items of more or less interest to your readers, but I note—as I scan my pages over—that I have already imposed greatly on your space and time. With all best wishes for the success of the brightest weekly it has been the good fortune of the Elktown post-office and its efficient master to distribute in our midst, I beg leave to sign myself, respectfully and admiringly yours,

THOMAS L. KEITH."

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"Ain't that a stunner?" Abner asked, as he finished reading. "I don't know what Keith he is, but he must be some kin o' old Uncle Tommy Keith over thar. The Keiths in that section are as thick as flies in August. He is a little roundabout in the way he tells a thing, but that makes it all the more interesting; he keeps you on the watch for what is coming. I'm going to see ef I can make anything out of the letters the Indian painted on the rock. That 85 has got something to do with feet or yards. I don't know but I may take a run over thar myself. I could kill two birds with one stone—see what's in this and git a good many new subscribers. I like to be in a turmoil of any sort, an' I'll bet they are in a big stew over thar. Now, we must git to work an' set this up in type. Put the biggest head-lines on it you possibly kin get up, and, above all, mum's the word. The news may reach Darley overland before our paper is out, but we'll hope not. It would tickle me the best in the world to see the folks openin' *The New Clarion* to-morrow an' runnin' across an item like that just as ef sech news was an every-day matter with us."

Howard was about to reply when he was arrested by a step on the stairs, and Frank Reymond entered. "I have a political item for you," he said. "I have just heard it from a reliable source. Henry W. Polton has come out in the Governor's race and will make a strong candidate. It will be important news for Southern dailies. I have just wired it to Atlanta, Charleston, New Orleans, Chattanooga, and Nashville, under a new arrangement I have made for special news."

"You can pick up a good many items now and then." Abner eyed Howard furtively, his lips curving in a triumphant smile. "We are much obliged for telling us about Polton, an' I only wish we was in the shape to do you a like favor. Now and then a big item falls on a weekly like our'n, but, as you kin well see, we couldn't afford to

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divide with the big dailies. You see, the Atlanta papers will be on the streets here in the morning, for instance, before we can get ours wrapped and distributed. We are in this thing for all thar is in it, an' we don't want to print stale news if a fresh variety lies ready at hand."

Reymond whistled softly. "I catch on," he said, with a smile. "You have some news now. I can tell by the way you chuckle, Uncle Ab. Say, don't you think you could tip me off?"

"Not on this, Frank." Abner shook his head firmly. "I'm sorry, but this thing is our special pie. If it was a little squib like the one you have handed us it would be different, but this—oh, just wait till you see *The New Clarion* in the mornin'. I don't know but what we may git some boys to yell it out as an extra at five cents a copy."

"I call that dog-mean, Uncle Ab," Reymond laughed, good-naturedly, "and you will feel bad if I hold back a piece of news from you some day. So long. I must go."

At the foot of the stairs Reymond met Pole Baker going up.

"Is Uncle Ab up thar?" Pole asked.

"Yes; I've just left him. Want to see him?"

"Yes; you remember I told you about the fuss betwixt Howard an' Fred Craig?"

"Yes, and it made me anxious, for I saw him down the street this morning. We must keep the two apart. There will be trouble if they meet."

"That is what I want to see Uncle Ab about," Pole went on. "He's worried, too, and I can set his mind at rest for a few days, anyway. Craig has just gone to Nashville. His sister is sick and telegraphed him to come up. For once in his life he was sober. Maybe the two will cool off by the time he gits back. I hope so, anyway."

CHAPTER XXII

AS he was walking past the public wagon-yard in the next block Reymond saw Tarp circulating about among the groups of men and women and children gathered about their wagons, and he paused for a moment to watch the active young merchant. Presently Tarp left the yard and approached Reymond.

"You've caught me at it," he smiled. "This is the sort of work that I can't trust to my help. Nobody knows as well as I do how to honey-fuggle mountain men and women—especially women. I can just take one sweeping look at a farmer's wife or daughter and tell whether they are looking for hats, dresses, or cloaks, and I always put in a word that stirs their curiosity and makes them crazy to get to my Emporium of utility and fashion. If I think a woman wants a hat I just tell about what a wonderful trimmer Miss Bessie Williams, from New York, is, and what a stunning dresser she is, and they'd rather see her than the President's wife. I notice you come down from *The Clarion* office." Tarp's eyes held a far-off look of anticipation as he spoke. "Anything new on tap?"

"Something has happened, but I don't know what it is," Frank answered. "They don't act fair with me, J. L. I put them on to every bit of news I scrape up. Look how I worked for them at their big dinner, and yet when they run on a plum they eat it seed and all."

Tarp's eyes shone. He reached out and took hold of Reymond's lapel and thrust a finger through a button-hole. "That's a fact; you *do* telegraph news to city

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papers, don't you? I had clean forgot it. Of course, important—real important news would be a feather in your cap. I see. I see. And it is a shame if they are so greedy that they won't divide. Now, on this special piece o' news—"

Tarp hesitated and dropped his glance to the toe of his shoe.

"Do you mean that you know what it is?" Frank asked, eagerly.

Tarp's profile was now toward the inquirer. He seemed to wear a sort of hesitation that was unusual with such an outspoken individual.

"Well, you know, it is like this," he said, gravely, twisting his finger more vigorously in the buttonhole. "I am the main advertiser and chief moneyed support of Daniel's paper. Hillhouse would have busted long before he did if it hadn't been for the hard cash I paid into his till every week, and I am doing even more for the new firm, for they have increased their circulation enormously and print a respectable sheet. So naturally, I reckon, they do sort o' talk free-like to me about what is coming, knowing that I keep a lock on my tongue, as you might say. Still, when it comes to a matter of public interest, like the fine bit of news they've got ready for to-morrow's issue—well, they ought to divide with you, Frank, that's all there is about it—they ought to divide. If *they* see fit to be hoggish I'm not so mighty sure that *I* am called on to eat slop out o' the same trough. This is going to bother me some, Frank, for when foul play is being enacted about me I don't like it. I like them fellers, and I'm willing to back them; but they have no right to gobble up news that ought to be as free as winds that blow over level ground."

"I'm glad you feel that way, J. L.," Frank said, warmly, "and since you happen to know what they've got up their sleeve, why—"

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"Oh, I'm not beholden to them," Tarp interrupted. "The shoe is on the other foot, I'm here to state. They didn't tell me not to mention it, either. I have made no promises, and if I tell you my conscience will be clear. The item really is a big one—a whopping big one. The only thing I'm afraid of is that half my customers here in town may grab picks and shovels and cut out lickity-split for Elktown and leave me in the lurch."

"Elktown?" Frank repeated. "Has anything happened over there?"

"Has there? Good gosh! Say, Tobe"—Tarp was calling to a negro man who was slouching past with a sack of flour on his shoulder—"where did you buy that?"

"Webb and King's," the negro replied, sheepishly, as he faced toward the questioner.

"I know." Tarp smiled derisively. "That is the Golden Glow brand. They are selling it at ninety cents a sack, while we are getting rid of whole car-lots to our customers at eighty. Tobe, some of these days you coons will learn where to do your trading."

"Maybe so, boss," the negro answered, humbly, and moved on.

"Say, J. L., old man"—Reymond almost with suspended breath returned to the topic in a pleading tone—"you will tell me about that thing, won't you? I may be able to do *you* a good turn some time."

"I don't care if I do, Frank. I'm a great hand to stand out for fair play. And as I look at it, it wouldn't do Howard and Daniel a bit of harm to have that news spread all over the civilized world. They will get the cream of it anyway, for I understand they've got a long detailed account of it."

Thereupon the merchant gave an adroit version of the matter, much to the satisfaction of the listener, who, when he had heard the whole story, fairly panted with excitement.

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"It is great, isn't it?" he cried. "I heard about that buried gold when I was a little tot at my mother's knee! and to think that it has come to light at this late date."

"Yes, it is all right, I guess," Tarp said, with the far-away expression in his eyes. "But, after all, it may not be located, for no living man may be able to unravel the letters painted on the rock. I'd put them in my report in proper order, if I was you. It will make the article more exciting. Folks in this day and time are anxious to get hold of any sort of a puzzle, especially if there is something to be made by it."

"The letters—oh, I forgot," Reymond broke in, "of course, I ought to have them; but how could I get hold of—"

"Oh, you see, Frank, I took the trouble to remember them," Tarp said, as he drew a slip of paper and a pencil from his pocket and wrote in the palm of his hand. "Here they are in due order: 'T. D. G. A. G. M. E. 85. M. S. D.'"

"Are you sure you got 'em right?" Frank asked, as he carefully copied the letters in his note-book. "I wouldn't make a mistake for anything. This will create a big sensation all over the country."

"The letters are all right." Tarp wiped a slight, impulsive smile from his lips. "They could stand for a thousand things as well as one, and folks are going to be badly mixed up as to the true meaning. By the way, Frank, while you were confabbing with Ab and Howard did they happen to say how they liked the—the—well, the way the article they got was—was shaped up?"

"They didn't go into that part." The face of the merchant was set in a mask of expectancy as the reply came. "But if the style was not all it ought to be," Reymond added, "Howard could shape it up. He knows how to scratch out and write in, I tell you. He writes as smooth as goose grease on any topic of current interest."

"He'll let *that* article stand as it came in!" Tarp spoke

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without thinking. "I mean—that is, I judge from all accounts that the style of the report is at the top notch—breezy, full of ginger. It is of good length, too, I understand, and got up by a writer that knows how to sling ink, if—if he *does* reside in the backwoods."

"Well, I'm much obliged to you, J. L.; I really am," Frank said, gratefully, as they parted in front of Tarp's establishment. "I'm going straight to the telegraph office. You bet I'll heat those wires. I'll pile it in on them, too. The big dailies don't mind paying for real news. They may wire me to go post-haste over there. If they do I'll get a fast horse and make a dash for the field of action."

The next morning at ten o'clock *The New Clarion* in great damp stacks was being folded, wrapped, and addressed.

"Ain't she a Jim-dandy?" Abner exclaimed to Howard and Miss Lizzie Swayne, as he held the front page up and eyed it with delight for the twentieth time. "A body could read that 'BURIED TREASURE' line across the public square."

Half an hour later the paper was being sold on the streets, a thing which had never happened before in the history of Darley journalism. A negro with a bell carried a banner on his shoulder bearing the words, written with a marking-brush dipped in lampblack, "EXTRA! GREAT NEWS FROM ELKTOWN!"

A little white boy with an armful of papers, timid in his new occupation, was at his heels.

Abner walked along the opposite side of the street, a smile of triumph on his face.

"Yell out, thar!" he ordered. "What did we tell you to say?" As he drew near Tarp's store Abner saw the merchant pasting half a dozen of the front pages of the paper on the outside of a plate-glass show-window.

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"Hey, what's this?" Abner asked, delighted, as he paused, his hands in the pockets of his trousers. "Steal-in' our thunder, eh?"

"Yes." Tarp's eyes gleamed oddly. "It is big piece of news, Uncle Ab. It may shorten your sale on the street a little to have it stuck up for so many to read for nothing, but it will draw attention to the bargains in the window. Folks are bound to stop to look, and my boys will invite 'em in."

"Have you read it clean through?" Abner inquired.

"Have I?— Oh yes—yes. I wasn't too busy for that, and I'm here to state, Uncle Ab, that it is simply great."

"Yes, good piece o' news," Abner agreed. "Jest look down the street. Thar is a bunch o' folks readin' it in every store door an' on every corner. Look! Thar goes a nigger on a dray with his kinky head buried in it."

"It is not only fine news, but—but the thing is got up in fine shape, if I am any judge," Tarp ventured to remark, as his eyes swept Abner's features probingly.

"Oh yes, we used some o' the new type we just got in. They seem to give it a fresh look an' make it stand out like from the body o' the paper."

"I'm not talking about the *type* or the *print*," Tarp was emboldened to remark; "it is the way the thing runs that I admire. That fellow Keith—I think that's his name; yes, Thomas L. He'll do to watch. I've read some in my day—in fact, I won a prize on a composition at school against fifty other scholars—and I ought to know a little about such things. Uncle Ab, that writing flows like a steady stream. I looked at it close, an' I couldn't see a word or a line that could be bettered."

"Oh, I don't know as to that," Abner returned. "We let our rural writers do purty much as they like. We didn't change this feller's article any because time was short; but all of us at the office wished it had been a little more correct."

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"Correct?" Tarp's color mounted in his cheeks and his voice rose. "Do you mean to tell me that there was anything wrong with the get-up of that article? Why, Uncle Ab, you never printed a letter as fine as that before. I know good writing when I read it, and from top to bottom that article is a corker."

"I don't mean that the feller didn't spell right or know the common rules of grammar," Abner said, "and we didn't expect him to be up on punctuation or paragraphin', either—the only mark he knowed about was a full stop, an' he often begun a sentence with a small letter instead of a big one; but you'd never notice that now, fer our type-setters would feel powerful ashamed ef they let mistakes like that pass through their hands fer other papers to laugh at. The point I'm making agin Keith as a perfect stylist—ef thar is sech a word—is that he switched in too much that seemed plumb out o' place. Everybody mentioned was 'esteemed' or 'popular in the community'; even the bait o' peaches that bore the Indian off to the Happy Huntin' Ground was of a variety known from Maine to Californy, an' the description o' daylight spreadin' over the land whar the early redskins drapped arrowheads sounded like some'n' from a school-girl's composition. But we didn't care; what we was after was the news, and we got it, don't you think so, J. L.?"

"Oh yes, I guess so." The face of the merchant was still red, and his eyes were burning resentfully. "It is all right. It is all right. It will be talked about far and wide. You bet it will. Them letters printed on the rock will puzzle many a man and woman till—till the meaning comes out."

"Ef it ever does," Abner returned, with a dubious note in his voice. "Dead men tell no tales, an' that secret may be buried with the only man that was onto the mystery."

CHAPTER XXIII

ALL the way down to the warehouse at the end of the street, whither Abner now strolled, he saw excited faces bending over the wonderful story. Beyond the warehouse stood a slender two-story cotton-gin, and unloading a bale of cotton unaided from a road-wagon to the low platform was a mountaineer Abner recognized as an old war comrade.

"By gum—Bill Spriggs!" Abner chuckled, "an' from Elktown, too. I wonder what fresh news he may have? The gold may be found by this time. Hello, Spriggs, how are you?" Abner extended his hand and smiled cordially. "When did you leave Elktown?"

"Four o'clock this mornin'," the lank farmer made answer, as he rested a horny hand on the trucks he was going to use. "How goes it with you, Ab?"

"Oh, so-so," Abner responded, focusing his eyes expectantly on the mild blue pair before him. "Anything new over your way?"

"Nothin' at all, Ab." The mountaineer shifted his tobacco quid to the opposite jaw and bore down on it. "We are as dead as a door-nail at Elktown. It is dryin' up, an' may blow away one o' these days. Three of our best families left fer Texas last week. We did have some excitement t'other day, though."

"Oh, you did?" Abner's face kindled expectantly. "You were in it, of course."

"No, thank God, I wasn't." The man stared in mild surprise. "In fact, nobody was in it at the time it was struck."

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"Struck? *What* was struck?" Abner cried.

"Why, the Methodist meetin'-house. The members had been debatin' on buying lightnin'-rods—old members for an' young ones agin it, when the storm came. It was terrible, Ab. Sam Trimble's new corn-crib, made out o' hard-pine poles, was blowed clean across the creek an' let down as level as a pan-cake on a polished floor without jar or jostle. Nobody, man nor beast, was harmed, thank the Lord. Ef thar hadn't been that dispute up among a body o' folks that call the'rselves Christians, they would have bought the rods an' the house would have been saved. As it was, it was burnt to the ground. You could have seed the blaze clean over here ef you'd been watchin'."

Abner stood like a man drifting into stupidity. He made a pretext of examining the sample of cotton bulging from a slit in the bagging. Then, with an icy stare, he said: "Nothin' else has happened over thar, then, except the storm an' the meetin'-house? I mean, of course, within the last *three* days."

"Oh, I see, you are out gittin' news fer yore paper. I seed a copy of it last week at Jones's store at the cross-roads, just this side o' the river. Folks over our way say it is a big improvement over the old sheet, an' yore old Army friends are all boomin' it. You kin write my name down fer a year, Ab. But as for news, I can't think of a thing just now. Thar is a big excitement in our neighborhood—"

"Oh, thar is?" Abner saw the straw and clutched it.

"Yes, but it don't seem to me to be the sort o' thing you'd care to print. Thar is a big talk about churchin' old Peter Tomlinson. It is whispered about that he slipped up whar Tim Barnett had been splittin' fence-rails an' stole Tim's new ax. The trouble is, that the committee to investigate the charges can't take action with the flimsy evidence. Peter says he found the ax chucked

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away under the west end o' Big Holly bridge as he was ridin' by one mornin'. He took the ax home, he claims, to wait to see if anybody had lost one. You see, thar is a bare chance that while old Peter is sorter close-fisted some tramp or other *may* have tuck the ax an' stuck it under the—"

"Yes, yes." Abner spoke in a harsh, even resentful tone as he looked up and down the street. "Then you hain't heard any *other* news over yore way?"

"Nothin' else, Ab; an' ef I was in yore place I believe I'd not mention Peter's name until—"

"No, I'll keep that out. In fact, I won't mention the durn thing at all. Well, I'll send you the paper, an' I'm much obliged, Bill."

"Sold! Sold!" Abner said under his breath, as he walked away. "Some skunk over at Elktown is laughin' good at us. By gum! he tuck me in; he sure did."

Heavy-hearted, all his enthusiasm gone, Abner climbed the stairs to the office. He found Howard and Miss Lizzie both reading two of the Atlanta morning papers. They looked up as he entered.

"Disappointment for you, Uncle Ab," Howard said. "In some way Frank Reymond got onto our big item and has telegraphed it at some length. It is a pity that we couldn't be the only ones to handle it."

"I think I see where we made a mistake," Miss Swayne spoke up. "We ought not to have let Frank know we had a piece of news. Of course, he went right out to see if anything was floating about."

"It don't matter—it don't matter a dang bit!" Abner growled. He picked up *The New Clarion*, and with a look of high disgust began to scan the Elktown article.

"Jackass, jackass!" he said to himself, and of himself. "Of course thar ain't no sech a man as Thomas L. Keith over thar; that's made up out o' whole cloth like the

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balance. Le'me see; whar is them dang letters so much is made of? Here they are:

"T. D. G. A. G. M. E. 85. M. S. D." Abner went over them slowly, one by one. Suddenly he looked up from the paper, stared steadily at Howard, and asked:

"Do you happen to remember what number on Main Street Tarp's store is at?"

"Eighty-five," Howard answered. "It's been printed often enough."

With a grim face and steady stride Abner went to a window and looked down on the street below.

"Tarp's Dry-goods and General Merchandise Emporium, 85 Main Street, Darley!" he muttered. "That's the article he wanted to run in at three cents a line, an' I held out fer ten. Tarpy, old boy, I hain't got on my hat just now, but ef I had it on, an' you appeared before me, I'd take it off an' sweep the ground with it. You don't look so awfully bright, but appearances are deceitful. Thank God we ain't alone in the mess. Them big dailies bit as quick as we did, ef they didn't spread it on as thick over the'r whole front page."

"May I come in, gentlemen?" A flushed face appeared at the door, and, smiling apologetically, Frank Reymond walked in. "I hated to do it," he laughed; "but 'all's fair in love and war,' and I have to hold up my end or lose my job. My papers want all the news, and if I hadn't landed that shark they would have thought I was sound asleep. As you see, I exaggerated some. You know I stated that all the places of business here in town were shut up."

"And that the mob broke into the hardware store to get picks and shovels to take to the scene of action," Howard added. "You covered less space than we did, Frank, but you lied more."

"Next time you'll divide with a fellow, I reckon?" Reymond said, teasingly.

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"Ef we ever git hold of a thing like this we'll donate it to you free of charge, Frank," Abner put in, sarcastically. "News like that ain't fit for a rural paper."

Miss Swayne was at a window now, looking down below. "I see Tarp's porter scattering blue and pink dodgers in the street. There are two boys doing the same thing farther down. They are running fast and yelling out to everybody. We didn't print those dodgers. Do you suppose he got Jim Hill to do it?"

Nobody replied, and Abner leaned out of the window and shouted: "Hey, thar, boy, fetch one o' them up here!" He met the panting youth at the head of the stairs, as also did Miss Lizzie, who took a circular and brought it back to her table.

"Yes, Jim Hill printed it," she said. "Bad, bad work. Good gracious, folks! Talk about quick action! Tarp is already turnin' our article into an ad. Listen:

"Great excitement over at Elktown. Since the first settlement of Georgia no greater sensation has been sprung on the State than the vast interest over the report of a certain buried treasure of gold. Our enterprising paper, *The New Clarion* (new in more ways than one, in this ripe age of gullibility), gave the main part of its present issue to the tale, and the big dailies all over the United States took it up with a whoop and a yell. And what was it all about? Why, a boy over near Elktown discovered on a rock some mysterious letters. They were:

"T. D. G. A. G. M. E. 85. M. S. D. And when he reported it at home the entire community went wild. They at once dreamed out a cock-and-bull yarn about an Indian finding a treasure of gold and leaving some letters on a rock as a guide to the spot. The Indian princess who was to inherit all the loot wasn't mentioned. Neither was the young chief who was a suitor for her hand and threw himself over a cliff when the clue was lost. But lo and behold! It now transpires that the letters were painted by a sign-writer the enterprising J. L. Tarp employed to go about decorating barns, fences, and even the face of nature itself with the rare opportunities this great mer-

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chant is holding out to the populace at large. The letters 'T. D. G. A. G. M. E. 85. M. S. D.' simply stand for 'Tarp's Dry-goods and General Merchandise Emporium, 85 Main Street, Darley.' It looks as if any sensible person aware of Tarp's enterprise would have recognized the true meaning of the letters; but it seems as if our wisest and most conservative citizens made the lamentable error herewith recorded. However, while there is some little disappointment over the outcome, the majority are realizing that while a buried treasure is out of the question, yet *a mine of pure gold* is found in the rare bargains Tarp is offering to one and all. He begs respectful leave to mention in this connection that he has just got in a full line of boys' and men's suits which are being fairly beaten to powder under the sledge-hammer of cash reduction, and—

"Punk!" Miss Lizzie broke off, in disgust. "The idea of Tarp trying to tie his little old business onto a piece of news like— But say!" she frowned, in perplexity. "Isn't it funny that he has managed to make those letters exactly fit his—"

"'Tain't overly funny to *me*," Abner grunted, as he crushed the circular in his hand and dropped it on the floor. "Has either of you boys got hobnails in your shoes? Ef you have, I want to squat on my all-fours at the head o' the stairs and have you kick me into the street. An' I'd like fer the whole dang town to see me when I hit the ground."

Blank faces met the remark. There was dead silence for a minute. Then Reymond groaned:

"I see it! Lord, Lord, I see it! Bunco is no name for the trick played on us."

At this moment one of Tarp's clerks came and handed Daniel one of the circulars and left. Written on the top were the words:

Editors of The New Clarion:

DEAR SIRs,—Kindly insert the inclosed circular among the locals in your next issue. As they will make only a few lines,

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I will have to pay your price per line; but, as I told you, I think that rate is too steep for anything as long, for instance, as the admirable letter from your Elktown correspondent, to which my circular calls modest attention. Respectfully yours, and with kindest regards,

J. L. TARP.

"Does he think we'll be fool enough to print it?" Howard asked, angrily. "He'll have to pay us for all that space."

"He's already paid *me*," Abner retorted. "He's give me a million dollars' worth of experience. Yes, boys, we've got to grin. A good, healthy, forgivin' grin is the only cure for a disease like our'n. He's got us whar the hair is short. We've got a chance to make folks think we took the stuff as an ad an' got paid for it. But, la! ef we kick one single bit we'll never hear the end of it."

"I don't know what my papers will say to *me*," Frank Reymond groaned. "I'm expected to send in facts, and nothing but facts. Now I'll have to wire 'em that it was all a fake."

"Ef you don't the railroads may run some excursions up that way," Abner said. "I'd sorter hate to have the mayor and city council of Atlanta startin' fer Elktown with campin' outfit and minin' tools."

CHAPTER XXIV

HOWARD'S place at the table in the hotel was next to Mrs. Langham and her daughter. He found Cora alone at dinner one day.

"I have a surprise for you," she smiled, "and it may not be a pleasant one, either. Do you still intend to go to Atlanta to-morrow?"

"Yes, I have some business Mr. Daniel wants me to attend to, and I have postponed it as long as I can. What is your surprise?"

"Why, I was telling mother about your going, and it really put her in the notion of running down on the same day. We have some shopping to do, and she wants to take a look at her flowers, which she is afraid our housekeeper may be neglecting. We would be there only a day and night, and then come back here."

"I am glad you are going," Howard said. "It will make the trip much more pleasant, for I don't care much for Atlanta in the warm weather."

"You must take luncheon with us when we arrive to-morrow," Cora said. "Mother has set her heart on it. She has already written to our housekeeper to have everything ready. You've never been to our home, and it really is rather nice even in the summer-time, for it is cool and well shaded."

With some vague misgivings, the nature of which Howard hardly understood, he accepted the invitation.

"You will meet my father, too, I hope," Cora continued. "He is taking his meals at the club; but if he

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is not overwhelmed with business he will join us at lunch. He is a very nice man, if I do say it," she added, with a smile; "he is rather stern in his manner even with mother and me, but he is a dear, dear man."

Howard had to do some early morning work at the office the next day, and so did not meet the Langhams till just before their departure at eight o'clock. He joined them in the observation-car at the end of the train, where they had secured comfortable seats. A shower of rain had fallen during the night which had laid the dust and cooled the atmosphere.

Howard had been to Atlanta often, but never under such circumstances as these, and he felt a slight touch of awkwardness in having those ladies of fashion in his charge. Cora looked unusually well in a cool linen dress, simple hat and veil, and her manner was exceedingly gracious, as if she felt a certain sense of hospitality already upon her now that she was homeward bound. Mrs. Langham, after a few minutes had passed, betook herself to a window and read a novel nearly all the way to the city. Once she eyed the pair cautiously above the margin of her book, and mused:

"She can't really be in love with him. She wouldn't think of marrying him, anyway. She has her father's foresight and caution, and would never take a step as unwise as that. It is only natural, though, for her to want to entertain him at home and let him see how nicely we live. He is sensible; anybody can see that; and he knows that she is not in his walk of life. She knows it, too, and that is why she fancies she likes him so much. She is interested in him. She is nicer to him than she has ever been to any other man she knows."

The journey was pleasant enough to the young couple. Howard was discovering a side to Cora's nature that was new to him, and he was not rebelling so strongly against her attractions. He was half convinced that he had mis-

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judged her in regard to her hunger for the admiration of men, and, after all, he began to ask himself, who could know positively that a confirmed flirt might not love some particular man as strongly and as unselfishly as any other woman? At any rate, the bare thought that she might actually care for him was an attractive one. She was so beautiful, so well poised, so highly bred. Surely there was no touch of haughtiness or even consciousness of her social position in her gentle demeanor to-day. If there had been he was sure he would have disliked her too much to have enjoyed her company so thoroughly.

Before they were aware of it the train was entering the rather begrimed suburbs of the city, given over to railway shops, factories, and warehouses, and soon it came to a stop in the big new station.

"The carriage will meet us," Cora informed Howard, as he got her things together. "James is always prompt, and will be anxious to see us. We have luncheon at two o'clock. It is now eleven, and you may go directly home with us if you wish," Cora added, as they came out of the car and joined the throng of passengers going toward the door leading to the street. "There will be plenty of room in the carriage."

"There is something I must attend to at once," Howard answered. "I think I had better come out later. I might miss the man I expect to see if I wait till the afternoon."

"You would if we had our way about it," Cora answered, sweetly. "Once we get you out home we will keep you as long as possible."

They were passing through the crowded waiting-room when Mrs. Langham exclaimed: "There is Fred Driscoll with the Carter girls. They are off for St. Simon's Island. I read it in Sunday's paper. Poor girls! they can only afford a week's outing; but they will make the most of it. See how they are laughing. Fred doesn't care for

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Delia. He'll marry somebody for money, see if he doesn't; but she is daft about him. I see James at the door waving to us. He won't come in here. He's afraid to leave the horses."

The driver, a middle-aged colored man, wore a silk hat and a long, dark-blue coat with brass buttons, and as he reached for the satchels Howard carried he doffed his hat and bowed servilely to the ladies.

"Why didn't Mr. Langham come?" Mrs. Langham asked, as they all followed the driver to the resplendent vehicle and well-groomed bays at the edge of the sidewalk.

"Said he was too busy, Miss," James answered, as he opened the carriage door and stood, still hatless, to one side. "Said fer me ter drive down fer 'im at dinner-time an' fetch 'im out."

As the prancing horses bore them away, and Howard turned to cross the street to go to the business part of the city, he glanced back. Cora was looking from a window. She waved a delicate handkerchief at him and smiled. Raising his hat, he smiled and bowed. As he walked along in the sunshine, he wondered what had come over him. Till now he had vaguely resented the fact of Miss Langham's wealth and popularity as a society woman. But he was asking himself now if he had the right to hold that against her. Surely her warm desire to entertain him in her own home and her present manner were evidence of genuine sincerity; and if that were admitted, then many things she had said to him in the past might have come straight from the heart; and if they had, what a difference it would make!

All the time that he was engaged in transacting the business he had come to attend to Cora remained in his thoughts. Finding himself free, the business over, he went to a hotel and engaged a room for the night, having decided that he would stay over till the next day and accompany the ladies back to Darley.

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Two o'clock found him alighting from an electric car in front of the Langham residence. The grounds were large and well cared for. Two wide gateways opened on a curving asphalt drive, which passed through a *porte-cochère* at the side of the white Colonial mansion, with its green outside blinds and the high corrugated pillars, to a spacious porch.

A young colored maid in white cap and apron and careful step answered Howard's ring and showed him into the great double drawing-room on the right of an equally roomy hall, from which a polished walnut stairway curved upward. Seating himself, he looked about him. Beyond the farthest parlor was a library, and adjoining this was a smoking-room or den. Massive plate-glass mirrors in gilt frames rose from the floor to the ceiling at opposite ends of the drawing-rooms, giving the effect of more space than could otherwise have been obtained. Howard had, indeed, never before been inside a residence that could equal it in splendor and good taste. A grand piano stood amid palms in an alcove formed by a beautiful oriel window. Here and there were classic marble statues, and good paintings in massive frames hung on the walls. Curtains of fine lace veiled the small-paned windows, and rare rugs were placed here and there with artistic effect on the polished inlaid floor. Suddenly Howard experienced a revulsion against the whole display of ease and luxury. He had written some strong editorials advocating the general leveling of classes and legal restrictions to great fortunes, and yet here he was taking a passive part in the thing he had opposed. He thought of Mary Trumbley with a certain touch of homesickness. He smiled as he fancied seeing her seated in one of the wing-chairs opposite him. She would be too well bred to smile, but she would be honest enough to think, and she would condemn his presence there. And, after all, why had he come? Why was he paying such attention

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to Cora Langham? Why, unless attracted either by her personality or social position? After all, was he as weak as the men he had so often criticized? A flush of dissatisfaction rose to his face.

The maid went up to Cora's room to inform her mistress of the arrival of the guest. She was turning away when Cora stopped her.

"Wait, Julia," she said, graciously. "You have been very nice to me, and I want to show appreciation. Don't disturb anything now, but all the things in the lowest drawer are for you. I sha'n't wear them any more, and they will fit you."

"Oh, I'm very much obliged, Miss Cora," the girl answered, as she glanced eagerly at the dainty articles lying in the half-open drawer.

"Tell me, Julia"—Cora looked toward the door leading to her mother's room, as if fearing that she might be overheard—"what do you think of my Darley friend? Isn't he handsome?"

"Very, Miss Cora. Your ma says he is a mighty smart young man. He cert'ney looks like it. She says he is poor as Job's turkey, but that don't make any difference. A smart man can make plenty of money an' get high up, too. Your pa is a smart man, Miss Cora, an' look how he's pilin' it up."

"Mr. Tinsley will never be rich." Cora shook her head thoughtfully. "He is not in a money-making business; but he can 'do better than make money. He may rise high politically. He looks gentle enough, doesn't he, Julia? But he is a fighter, and has a *terrible* temper. His friends up at Darley right now are trying to keep him from meeting a dangerous man that insulted him not long ago. They say there will be bloodshed if the two should come together again."

"He looks like a gentleman that won't take any foolishness off of anybody." Julia was withdrawing when her mistress stopped her again.

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"I want you to see that everything moves off right at luncheon," she said. "Don't let any mistakes be made in serving the courses, and, above all, don't hurry them in. Give us plenty of time."

The telephone rang in the hall below. Julia went to answer it, and Cora turned to her mirror to finish her toilet. After a moment her mother entered. "Are you going to keep him waiting down there alone all day?" she asked, sharply. "I sent the papers in to him and told Ellen to offer him a cocktail and a cigar. I think I am doing my part better than you are, after all your fears to the contrary."

"I'm going down now," Cora answered, with a glance at the mirror and a parting touch to her hair. "Do I look all right?"

"What's the use asking? You know you do. You know also that you are putting yourself out more to-day to entertain this country boy than you have ever done for any one else. I don't know why you are doing it, and I don't care particularly. I suppose it has a certain novelty about it. You know that he is not accustomed to our way of living, and you like to be the one to introduce him to it."

"I'll tell you one thing, mother"—Cora made no denial of this—"and that is that you don't understand him. He is not a shallow man. You say men have spoiled me by attention. Perhaps so, but Howard Tinsley won't spoil any girl living. Do you know what has kept him from being as attentive as the rest? Nothing but the fact that my father is wealthy and he has nothing. Can you blame me for being interested in him when he has everything but money? Several times he has been on the verge of telling me he loved me, but checked himself. I am sure of it. No other man ever acted so—they are all so full of themselves that vanity fairly leaks out of them."

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"Well, my mind is relieved on *one* point," Mrs. Langham said, with a smile. "I was afraid your father would not treat him cordially and spoil your pleasure, but he has just telephoned that he is too busy to come to lunch."

"Thank Heaven!" Cora cried. "He is a surly old bear at times, and seldom sees good in any man friend of mine. He wouldn't care for Howard's brain and ability as a writer. He measures men by the money they make."

"I am sure you do, too, dear, down at the very bottom," smiled Mrs. Langham. "Howard Tinsley attracts you because he is holding off like a sensible man should, but once let him declare himself and you would—well, then he would fall in line with all the rest."

"Do you think so, mother?" Cora stared anxiously, as if she really was desirous of information on a perplexing problem.

"I know it," Mrs. Langham answered, confidently. "There are some girls—a few situated as you are—who would take a leap in the dark like that, but you happen not to be one of them."

Cora made no response. For the moment her thoughts seemed to be far away. She descended the stairs slowly. She was indulging in the most unworthy adventure of her life. Failing to bring Howard Tinsley to her feet, she was appealing for aid to the splendor of her city setting. Until now he had seen her only in that crude hotel in the mountains, among simple people, but now he was seeing her in her own element. She did not pause to reflect on what her opinion of him would be in case he was influenced by such a subterfuge.

"I am sorry I kept you waiting," she said, as she gave him her hand and smiled more sweetly, it seemed to him, than she had ever smiled before. Her favorite perfume was in the air. He inhaled it with a delight that crept upon him with a quickened realization of her rare charm

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and beauty. How nice it was of her to treat him with such obvious favoritism!

"I'm sorry that the maid did not show you into the library." She glanced toward the room in question. "You might have amused yourself looking over our books. We have quite a variety, and some by your favorite philosophers."

As she led him away she noted the untouched glass on the table. "Oh, I see you haven't drunk your cocktail. Hadn't you better before we see the library?"

A weaker man from Howard's walk of life would have done so in the first place, certainly when so charmingly urged, but he simply said, "Thank you; I am not in the habit of taking anything before meals."

"You know I was not, either, up at Darley among all your good people," she said, half in self-defense. "When in Rome I do as the Romans do, but here such drinks are so much a part of the regular order that they come natural. I've had one already. My mother's had two. I really did not know, Howard, that you were opposed to such things."

"I am not," he said, frankly, and he looked into her eyes with the sustained force she had so often felt. "I did not drink it simply because it is not a part of my daily routine. If you stop to think you will see that nothing could be cruder than for one to try to adjust himself at a moment's notice to new habits. If I really cared for cocktails I I suppose I would drink them at home."

"There is something in your argument," Cora admitted, gracefully. "You can easily do as we Romans do here and not drink cocktails, for many men do not — my father, for instance."

They were now in the library. It was a beautiful room, every side of which was lined with mahogany cases filled with books in costly bindings. With the eager eye of a student he scanned the titles through the glass doors, she

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following at his side. Above the bookcases family portraits were suspended, and as he glanced at them she told him who they represented. The most ancient of all was that of a Virginia ancestor on her father's side.

"You see, he was English," she said, in the same light tone she had used hundreds of times before in introducing the portrait to observers. "He had grants to vast estates in this country—was some sort of official under the crown. It is said that he was in the line for a title of some sort—Sir Something-or-other—but made no claim for it, so it failed to come down to my father. At any rate, we are glad he was able to have his portrait painted by a good artist."

"My father's earliest American ancestor," Howard said, with a frank smile, "was too poor to have had a tin-type taken. He was a wheelwright, and a Quaker with rigid views. You know the Quakers of that day took off their hats to no one, not even to kings."

"You are a worthy descendant." Cora felt in a vague way that she had not said exactly the proper thing in speaking of the portrait. Indeed, Howard Tinsley had a way of making her conscious of all her weak points. She had never admired him more than at this ineffectual moment.

"I wouldn't have you think, Howard," she faltered, while her color mounted in her face, "that I am silly enough to boast of my ancestors, for I think all that is rubbish."

His silence at this point was more condemning than if he had openly agreed or disagreed with her statement. He had turned to look at a particular set of Plato's works when Julia came in with a silver tray containing two cards.

"It is Mr. Tumblin and Mr. Wells," she said, loud enough for Howard to hear. "They were passing in an auto and stopped for a minute. They wouldn't come in. They said your father told them you were here. They said they knew you was tired now, but they want to

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come this afternoon to take you for a ride. They are waiting at the door for your answer."

Cora made a wry face and smiled at her guest. "I don't want to go," she declared. "I can see them any day. You have heard of Will Tumblin and Bryan Wells, I'm sure. Their names are always in the papers as leading some social function or other. They are professional beaus. They have bachelor apartments in the Kimball, and give wonderful dinners and musicals." She turned to the maid. "Tell them I'm sorry, but I can't possibly see them to-day."

"But—" Howard had looked up to protest when she interrupted him:

"I don't want to talk to them—they always tire me. It would be the same old twaddle about society—gossip pure and simple. Besides, this day is for *you*," she added, gently, as the girl was leaving. "I am going to drive you around this afternoon. There are a dozen things to show you. We must take in the Driving Club, out of town. I want to show you the giddy throng that gathers there every afternoon at this season."

He was trying to formulate some protest against her profusive efforts in his behalf when a man-servant appeared at the door.

"Luncheon is served," he announced, and Cora led her guest out to the dining-room.

CHAPTER XXV

JAMES L. TARP one Sunday morning drove out to Trumbley's. Mrs. Trumbley had been in the store the day before, and as he with his own hands cut off and wrapped up the few yards of calico she had bought she had chided him for not coming out to see them as often as had been his habit. He had pleaded overwork as the reason he had not visited them, so she had reminded him that Sunday was a good day for town people to come to the country, and ended by inviting him to dinner the next day. She had not told Mary of this at once, for she feared her daughter's displeasure. She spoke of it first to her husband that evening as they sat on the porch after supper.

"I simply knowed I had to prod him up a little," she said. "Things are not goin' right. Mary is more offish than ever—why, the Lord only knows. J. L. Tarp is as fine, if not *the* finest catch in this county. He wants Mary and shows it by every word that he lets fall. But he ain't a fool, and he knows she is cold toward him."

"Oh, ef he wants to marry he'll let it be known," Tobias mumbled, half through his reeking pipe. "That feller knows what he's about, an' ef he's afeard of a gal it is the only thing he's afeard of. Strike his pocket ef you want to see him wiggle an' squirm, an' cuss, too. I had a dispute about the salt that was charged to me when I killed hogs last winter. He wasn't thinkin' about whose daddy I was then. He got red clean up back of his ears, an' fairly pounded that ledger as he swore up an' down

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that his bookkeeper couldn't make a wrong entry. I had to give in. He could show writin' fer it, an' I had no record. The nigger I sent fer the salt may have stole a sack, for all I know. You needn't bother about Mary, nuther. Ef she takes a likin' to 'im she'll show it. Wornen always do—even the head-hangin', shy ones—an' entirely too soon, ef I'm any judge. I wouldn't blame Mary, though, ef she shies off an' stays off. Tarp's a cold proposition. Ef I was a woman I wouldn't like to be bought like a hoss—or a mare, nuther. Ef J. L. Tarp was on a deal fer eternal salvation he'd want to know what the market price was, the discount fer cash, an' the exact time that was best to lay in a supply. He is as keen as a brier. I give 'im credit fer that, an', as you say, he is bound to git rich ef he ain't already so. He's business to the hilt, but I don't blame a gal fer not wantin' to tie up with 'im fer 'er whole life. I don't know why, but I don't. He ain't the feller to say saft words; an' ef I'm any judge, a woman 'u'd rather wash an' scrub fer saft words from a poor man than live in a mansion with a cold-blooded, money-grubbin' skunk that only grins when he sees a coin rollin' his way. That's why I am sorter sorry fer Mary. Tarp ain't exactly her kind."

"I know what I'm doin'," Mrs. Trumbley returned. "Mary will thank me later on. I know she will."

Mary was not informed of the anticipated visit till the next morning at breakfast. She was an obedient girl, and said nothing, though her lips were drawn firmly and there was a cold gleam in her eyes. When the merchant arrived he and she attended service at the little meeting-house half a mile down the main road, and when they returned they found that dinner was ready. Abner Daniel was seated with her father on the porch, and Abner rose to shake hands with Tarp as the couple came up the steps. Mary caught his kindly glance and felt that it was inspired by deep sympathy. She loved the old man, and

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was sure that he understood her better than most of her friends.

"How did you like the sermon?" Abner inquired of Tarp, with a quizzical flash of his eyes.

"Old-timey enough, goodness knows," Tarp answered. "I like a good sermon now and then, but I want it to be full of sense. I don't want no theology to be out of the reach of ordinary folks. This one to-day was the old text about the eye of the needle and the man that couldn't get through till he sold out lock-stock-and-barrel and gave his all to the poor."

"I reckon you'd want to have a sale o' some sort in yore'n," Abner said, with an irrepressible chuckle. "Ef the Lord was to tell you what He did to that chap you'd have a circular out the next minute statin' that you'd been commanded from on High to git up the biggest mark-down slaughter of remnants and odds and ends that ever happened."

"Uncle Ab never has forgiven me for the Elktown letter I wrote," Tarp said to Mary. "Ef I do say it, Miss Mary, that was the smoothest ad I ever put out. I took the trouble to see what the effect was on my trade, and I must say that it reached farther than any ad I ever got up, and when you stop to think that I wasn't out a cent it sorter makes a feller feel like getting up new ideas on that line—I mean the sort of advertising that costs nothing. Uncle Ab, I've just started in on a little scheme that I'll bet no other storekeeper ever thought of. I've had a whole stack of tickets printed that run like this:

"Good for ten cents in cash when presented exactly one year from date at the mammoth bargain stores of J. L. Tarp."

"What's the idea?" Abner asked, winking at Mary. "Knowin' you as I do, ef I got one o' them tickets and toted it to your store I'd expect to be told that I'd overlooked the proviso that I'd git the money ef I'd take

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poison or blow my brains out on the spot to attract a crowd."

"But this is straight goods, Uncle Ab," Tarp insisted, in commercial parlance, "and it is based on sound business calculations to boot. Why it hasn't been done before is a mystery to me. It is like this. Every morning I stamp a fresh date on the tickets to be given out that day, and that staves off payments for twelve months. Then I put a ticket in the bundle or bundles of every customer whose cash purchase amounts to twenty-five dollars or more. You see there are a lot of ends to the string. Folks will go miles out of their way fer even a small amount of actual cash. They will take a ticket home with them and a whole neighborhood will drop in to get a look at it. The next day droves of folks will come to my place and buy enough to entitle them to tickets. No family will feel right that hasn't got them about. Some will go in so heavy that they will want one to fall due every day in the year. They will stick them up on a mirror or a clock dial for all to look at, and every ticket carries my ad, you see."

"An' you can bust or move clean out o' the country before a single ticket is cashed," Abner remarked, sardonically.

"Oh no, I'll hold the fort," Tarp answered, quickly. "That is one of the biggest features in it. When the day arrives for the payment of a ticket you may be sure the whole family will bestir themselves early, and many outsiders, friends, kin-folks, and acquaintances will go along to see it well done and make a gala day of it. They will buy more, too, for they will want the event to come around again, even if they have to wait a year. Uncle Ab, you are always advocating spending money on printer's ink, but this free, endless-chain advertising idea of mine beats your high-rate sort all hollow. Just stop and figure a minute. A decent ad in your paper would

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cost in one issue, we'll say, twenty dollars. Now suppose I give out ten of my ten-cent tickets in a day; that would mean that I sold two hundred and fifty dollars' worth of goods or more at a profit, all told, of fifty dollars. Now you see I'm out only one dollar to get all that, and the thing spreads like wild-fire in dry timber besides. Can you beat that? Can *anybody* beat it?"

"Folks tell me you kin beat any' egg but a bad one," Abner answered, evasively. "Bunco is the shortest word fer yore game. You may think it will work, but it won't take a week fer thinkin' folks to see through it an' be ashamed to be caught dead with one o' yore tickets on 'em."

"J. L.," Trumbley put in, with his drawling voice, as he leaned forward admiringly, "I reckon you never fell *plump* flat on any scheme you ever got up?"

"Oh yes; I'm not perfect, even in my wildcat advertising," Tarp answered, complacently. "I remember I missed it bad on one thing I tried. I got up a big hurrah idea a few years ago. I put out an ad that everybody was welcome to come and look at my big display whether they bought a cent's worth or not. And to prove it—my notion being to draw a crowd, you see—I advertised that some clerk hid about the place was keeping tab on the folks as they entered the front door and counting them. Whenever the twenty-fifth—and every successive twenty-fifth—crossed the sill a bell was rung, and one of my sales-ladies stepped right up to the lucky person and made him a present of some sort or other, whether he'd heard of the arrangement or not."

"I see," Abner laughed. "He got a lead-pencil, and was persuaded to buy a suit of clothes, a kitchen outfit, or a steam threshing-machine."

"Oh no, the gifts was substantial," Tarp corrected. "In fact, my idea was to make them as showy as I could at a little cost. I was buying a gaudy lamp those days

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all complete, globe, shade, and wick, that stood nearly a yard high, freight, packing, and crating paid, at thirty cents each. We gave away lots of them, as well as some light paper-covered trunks at the same price. You see, when they was carried up the street and along the country roads the lucky winners was stopped by everybody they met, and had to explain where they got them, and that more was to be had on the same terms. I knew one fellow that left our place at ten o'clock one morning with a big framed chromo and didn't get home till seven that night. His family thought he'd fallen in the river, and was about to institute a search for him when they heard him yelling down the road to come see what he had. But I had to give it up. It was no go. Folks got so excited that they wouldn't buy anything. They was packed like sardines between the counters, and trampled one another under foot like stampeded cattle. Sometimes two would enter the door so close together that both had to be rewarded. Women scratched each other, and men fought with their fists. One fine show-case was smashed. Once I had to quit and go to court as a witness right when I was most needed at the store. Oh, it was an awful stew! I caught thirty or forty school boys and girls coming in at the front door, scooting out at the back, an' coming in again at the front, yelling 'twenty-five!' at the top of their lungs. In the crowd you couldn't swear you'd seen one before, and so they had you. The crowd got so rampant that they grabbed bolts of goods or anything they could tote and started off with it. If I hadn't called it off they would have gutted the house."

After dinner Tarp asked Mary to take a drive with him in his buggy, and, fearing her mother's displeasure, she accepted. They drove along a delightfully shaded mountain road. Mary had noted something about her companion's manner that alarmed her. His speech had become more reluctant, now that he was not on his

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favorite topic, and she found difficulty in keeping the conversation going. They had reached a deep spring on the roadside, and he had gotten out and brought her a drink in a glass he had in the buggy, when she saw that he had something of importance to say. She suspected what it was, and all but shuddered at the ordeal before her.

"There is no use beating the devil about the bush, Miss Mary," he began, when he had reseated himself by her side and taken up the reins. "I've put off this talk as long as I think I ought to. If I am not mistaken, you know why I've always gone with you and come out to see you more than any other lady. Miss Mary, I'm an all-round home body, if I do say it. I'm like my pa, who believed in a man marrying before it was too late. I've got to get me a wife, and I know what I want to a T. I could look the field over and pick one, I reckon, that would add capital to my business, but I ain't that sort. A fellow that marries a moneyed woman will find himself in hot water. He can't be the head of the house in that sort of a deal, and a man that ain't that is a plumb misfit. For many reasons you are just the one I'm looking for. Your mother has brought you up sensible. You are not spoiled by fool town notions. You will smile, I reckon, when I tell you that I've even read over your pa's bills to see the things you buy, the trimmings for your dresses and hats, the solid, sensible shoes and gloves, and the like. More than once I've made a clerk wrap up a better-grade article than the one that was ordered, just because it was for you. To tell you the truth, I don't know of a single thing about you that I object to. This may not be the most suitable time and place to say it, but I like your looks—I always have from the first time I laid my eyes on you. You are full of health and spirits, and a man in my line needs a cheerful, uncomplaining wife. I want a home. Boarding alone is not to my notion. I want a nook to retire to when I'm fagged out after a rush.

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In fact, I want all that a well-regulated married man ought to have. To be plain, I want plenty of children about. My mother had fifteen. Twins came three times; but they don't run in our blood. My mother had a wonderful disposition. She did the washing and ironing and all the housework. She was one of the good old-fashioned sort that are growing as scarce as hens' teeth. I want to go ahead in the ranks of men, and I want a companion to spur me on to victory. Now I've said all that comes to mind in this connection, and if you feel as I do, why—well, you'll marry me, that's all, and the sooner the better. In fact, there is a lull in business right at present, and I could be spared from the store for a week. I thought we could take a trip to New York. I want to do my fall buying, and if you was along we could have every evening together. The last time I was there old man Clark, of Clark, Weyland & Co.—the head of the whole string of houses West and East—told me if I'd marry and bring my wife on he'd make us both have a fine time. He is a jolly old chap. I told him about you one day when he had me out to lunch in a swell café on Broadway, and he said it seemed to him that you were just the thing. What do you say, Miss Mary? I made up my mind this morning driving out that I was going to get this thing settled, and I'm not going back without an answer. 'Is it yes, or no?'

Mary was fairly pale. The situation was very painful, and she hardly knew how to meet it. She was silent for a moment, then she faltered:

"The trouble is that I do not really feel as you do." "I look at marriage differently. I must love the—the man I marry, if I ever should marry. I like you and admire you, but you must never mention this subject to me again."

"Is that final?" Tarp asked, with an almost incredulous stare.

"Yes, it must be," she answered, firmly. "I hope you

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will never speak of it again. It hurts me—it hurts me deeply. You mean it as a compliment, and it *is*, in a way, of course; but I hope you will not speak of it again.”

“Well, you know best,” the merchant answered, in considerable chagrin of a certain sort as he shook the reins over the back of his horse and started him on. “To tell you the truth, there isn’t but one other woman in the world that I ever even thought about in the same connection, and, as you see, I gave you the preference. Between the two you are ahead by several laps.”

“Then there *is* another?” Mary said, in relief.

“Yes, I admit I have give a little thought to another one; but you won out—I mean that you come nigher the mark than she does. You’ve seen her, and talked to her. It is Miss Bessie Williams, my new milliner. She’s been under my eye for two months now, and she seems all right, as far as I can see. One thing in her favor is that she knows my business pretty well. I could leave her in absolute charge if I was called away, and feel certain that a safe person was at the helm.”

“Have you—spoken to her?” Mary asked, timidly and hopefully.

“Oh no; as I said, Miss Mary, up to this minute you have had full sway, and if you still want to reconsider the matter, why, we could leave it open, for, say—”

“Oh no!” Mary cried. “Let it be as it is; please do.”

“All right; you are the doctor.” Tarp tried to smile cheerfully. “I only thought from the way your ma spoke—I don’t know whether she was just trying to get her purchases lower and a little further credit or not, but more than once she has—”

“Oh yes, I know,” Mary broke in; “she seems to wish it, but I do not, Mr. Tarp. Frankly, I do not.”

“Well, let it slide,” he said, in a tone of abstraction. “I’ll mention it to Miss Bessie. I don’t know whether it will astonish her or not, for so far there hasn’t been a

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word of the sort spoken or a hint thrown out. I'm not the kind to raise hopes and drop them. You know that. I deal fairly with my trade, and I'm going to do the same in matters of the heart. A business man can't do any other way, Miss Mary."

CHAPTER XXVI

DESPITE the strong efforts made by Abner Daniel and Pole Baker to prevent a meeting between Howard Tinsley and Fred Craig, the thing came about sooner than expected. One morning, as Howard was entering the post-office, he encountered Craig coming out. As usual, the farmer was flushed with drink. His eyes flashed with fury as they met those of the younger man, and he grunted in contempt. Stepping up to him, Howard demanded an apology. With an oath Craig refused. Instead he drew back his right hand to strike. Howard caught it, twisted it sharply downward, and hit him on the cheek. For an instant they stood apart, then rushed together, and several powerful blows were given and taken before the town marshal and a deputy reached the scene, and, aided by the bystanders, separated the two by sheer force. Craig was struggling wildly and was wiping the blood from a gashed lip, trying to draw his revolver from his hip pocket, and growling like an infuriated brute. Frank Reymond was among Howard's friends, who led him toward his room in the hotel that he might wash his bruised face and arrange his dress, his shirt and necktie being torn.

"You must have common sense, and not fight a drunken fool like that," Frank said, soothingly.

Howard drew back on the edge of the pavement. "Common sense," he panted, beside himself with rage, as the curious crowd gathered and pressed close about them; "there is only one sort of common sense I'll have,

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and that is this. Listen, all of you. I'll kill that puppy as sure as God let's me get at him. Wait and see if I don't. You may pull us apart now, but I am not through with him."

"Don't listen to him," Frank said to the crowd. "He's mad and excited. He doesn't mean that."

"Mean it? You don't know me," Howard cried. "The world is not big enough for us both. I'll settle him. I swear I will. I'll kill him like a dog. Some of you heard what he called me. If you think I'll take it you are no friends of mine."

At this moment Abner Daniel pushed his way through the throng to Howard's side. "Come up to your room and get your clothes straight," he said, his face pale with excitement and sympathy. "We've got some important work to do at the office."

"I've got important work to do outside of the office," Howard fumed, but he allowed his old friend to lead him by the arm up to his room, where he left him.

At the door of the office Abner found Pole Baker waiting for him. Pole had heard the news, and Abner had never seen him look so grave.

"Meddling folks have been totin' tales betwixt the two," he remarked. "I got onto several nasty squibs floating about. Thar are men who had rather keep bad blood stirred up than make a fortune in money, and a good many are jealous of Howard's rise. This has just begun, Uncle Ab; nothin' but gun-shots will satisfy them two. I can't blame Howard, fer the boy simply was born with a pride and a temper that nothin' kin check in a mess like this."

"Howard said too much before that crowd just now," Abner answered. "If—if he did happen to harm that skunk he'd have a hard case in court to fight, after the positive way he spoke before so many witnesses. What's to be done? I don't know. I'm sure. We can't put the boy

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under restraint, fer he is his own boss—free, white, an' twenty-one. They say Craig used an awful word to 'im; but the courts won't be influenced by that if anything deliberate is done, an' ef they meet again it would be after deliberation."

"I don't know what to advise," Pole frowned; "but we must do something. Howard is too young and has too many bright prospects before 'im to be ruined by a rotten swill-barrel like Craig."

Half an hour after the fight Howard came down from his room alone, his friends having thought it best to leave him to his own thoughts. Next door to the hotel was a hardware store. Howard turned into it, passing a group suddenly silent at his approach, and made his way back to a gunsmith's shop in the rear. An old man by the name of Higgins was bending over a lathe, and, looking up with a start, he stared and blinked at Howard from beneath his bushy gray brows.

"Have you fixed my revolver yet?" Howard asked, calmly.

"Yes, it is ready, Howard, but—" the old man ended, helplessly. "I hope that you—"

"Where is it?" Howard asked, impatiently, as two of the bystanders at the front walked back softly and stood listening, their eyes wide with interest.

The gunsmith dropped his eyes to the floor. He hesitated before speaking. "The truth is, Howard, that I don't want to return it to you just now. I'm old enough to be your grandfather, and—"

"Give it to me!" Howard demanded, sharply. "It's my property, and I will have it."

The long white beard of the old man shook. He laid a trembling hand on Howard's shoulder. "I've known you ever since you was a child, my boy," he faltered. "I've known your ma and pa for forty years. Your ma's one of the best women in the world, and if she thought

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you was arming yourself, mad as you are now, it would drive her distracted."

Howard was pale with suppressed fury. Glancing at a near-by shelf, he descried his revolver, and he reached out and took it. He thrust it into his pocket and turned away. The gunsmith tried to stop him, but he drew back.

"Pardon me for being rough, Mr. Higgins," he said, sharply, "but I must be my own judge in this affair. Craig is armed, and I've got to be also."

With the weapon in his coat pocket, Howard left the shop and went down to the office. Abner, unable to work through sheer worry, was waiting for him. He had heard that Craig had been persuaded by some intimates to go home, and there was no immediate danger of the two meeting, but still the old man was greatly disturbed.

"There is a thing you mustn't forget," Abner remarked, with the intention of taking his young friend's mind from the dangerous theme, "and that is that you've got an engagement to call on Mary this evening. I heard you make it, you know, and I told 'er I would fetch you back with me in my buggy and make you take supper thar. You could spend the night at your house or walk back to town afterward, just as you see fit."

"I will walk back," Howard answered. "I like to set to work early. I hadn't forgotten my engagement."

"Well, I'll bet Mary will set forth something good to eat." Abner was continuing his would-be distracting remarks. "I tell her that I love to have company drap in, because we always git a change o' diet an' set her invention to work. She is a fine gal—that un is, my boy, as sure as yo're born. She's rounded out to a king's fancy in every particular. I've seed 'er in storm an' fair weather, an' I've never yit seed her rumped in the slightest."

From a passing farmer Tobias Trumbley had heard of the encounter. He had brought the news home before

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sundown, and Mary was quite upset, though she endeavored to conceal her emotions from the family.

After supper Abner and the others left the young couple under the trees in the moonlight. Nothing had been said at the table on the all-important subject, and it looked as if Mary scarcely dared to touch upon it. However, as their talk became more confidential toward the end of his visit, and as he was rising to leave, she ventured to speak of it.

"I'm awfully sorry and worried," she faltered, "and not alone for myself, as your best friend, Howard, but for your mother. When she hears of this, as she is sure to do, it will almost break her heart. She heard about the dispute you had with Craig not long ago, and she, along with many of us, has been dreading the outcome."

Howard smiled in a forced sort of way. He had taken Mary's hand, and he now stroked it soothingly. "I can't talk to a girl about a thing of this nature, Mary," he said, gently. "You women do not understand."

"We understand a great deal more than you give us credit for." Mary gave him her eyes steadily. "We understand—those of us who read and think do, at least—that what you call defending your honor and the like is simply a relic of ancient barbarism. There is no doubt about it. A bad man habitually insane from whisky-drinking in his stupor insults a high-tempered moral man in his right senses. Now, one intellectually is full-grown, and the other is a child. Ancient barbarism whispers to the sober man that he must resent what the other—the child—has said, so he arms himself and stands ready to shoot the child on sight. But that is not all. Howard, I am sorry to speak so pointedly, but I know that I am right, and that it is my duty to do it, even if it hurts your feelings. The whole thing has absolute selfishness at the bottom of it. You wouldn't wear a necktie or a suit of clothes that would give offense to a woman friend. You

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would not say a word that would pain your mother, but under this mistaken idea of what your rights are you would torture her and others who love you, more than if you beat them with a club. Your mother to-night doubtless will be unable to sleep. A woman's son, even in manhood, is still a babe at her breast when he is in danger. You know, I profess to be a Christian, Howard; but I sometimes think I see a depth in our Saviour's meaning that is overlooked by many orthodox believers. The more I read of philosophy the more Christ looms up as a thinker so far ahead of our present age that we are incapable of comprehending His most valuable commandments. Anger is at the bottom of all antagonism and war. Governments never would be at strife against each other if they realized the truth of His teachings in regard to the exalted beauty of universal peace and brotherly love. My tongue refuses to act when I try to express what I think on this subject. It seems so simple and plain; but others fail to see it as I do, and I don't know how to convince them. Perhaps I can explain it by my own experience. When I was in school there was a girl whom I did not like at all. Every act and word of hers grated on me. Everything I could hear that was to her disadvantage I took delight in telling to others. My friends, too, soon found out that I was pleased to hear things against poor Sally Moore, and they busied themselves reporting all sorts of gossip to me which tended to keep alive the animosity between us. This went on for a year or so. I was sure that my hatred for her was as justifiable as my love for a more congenial person. But one day our lesson had been the Sermon on the Mount, and the beauty of it captured my whole soul. I was at my desk, and as I closed the Bible I happened to glance across the room and saw Sally staring in front of her. I noticed that she looked pale. Her features were sharp and haggard. Some one had said that she had been

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sitting up with a little sick sister, and in consequence had got behind her class. Then all at once, as if in a flash of divine light, I saw a certain truth for the first time, and I sat almost dumfounded. I had been calling myself a Christian—teaching a class of boys and girls in Sunday-school—and yet had overlooked the very highest spiritual law. I lowered my head and prayed. I asked God to wipe out the hatred that was in my heart, and at once a change came over me. Next I began to wonder if I could really turn the other cheek to that poor girl. Day after day passed during which I was in constant struggle with my lower nature. Sally and I often passed each other without speaking, and I began to hope that I might be able to make actual advances; but there was always a pride in me that refused to be conquered. One day, however, word came to Sally that her little sister was much worse, and she left the school. My desk was near the door, and as she was passing she happened to drop her eyes to mine. She was crying. Getting up, I went out with her. I took her hand. All my pride was gone. I begged her to forgive me. I took all the blame on myself. We had to pass through a lonely little wood to get to her house, and during that walk we wept together. Howard, say what you will—call it silliness, weakness, stupidity, what not?—that morning I released a spiritual force in me that runs the machinery of the whole world. I spent the night at her house, to the wonder of all my acquaintances. The little girl got better, and Sally and I were the truest of friends afterward. Howard, the same thing holds good among men. If you could—if you only could rise to a higher sort of courage than you had when you met Craig to-day you could save your mother much pain and no doubt influence a bad man to reform. Howard, I believe that is what we are here for; we are here to conquer the flesh. I admire you very much, but I'd admire you more if you could crush out the rage in your heart

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to-night. You are on the brink of a precipice. One step and your whole life may be ruined, as many a young life has been ruined. You have an awful temper, and it is your duty to God, to those who love you, to the part you play in our civilization, to control it."

They were at the gate. He was seeing Mary in a new light, and as he looked into her face a rare spiritual radiance seemed to have captured it. She was wonderfully beautiful under its glow. Her eyelashes shimmered as from the gathering mists of tears. Under stress of deep emotion her voice had failed her.

"You are right, I suppose," he faltered. "I wish I could be as you are, but I am not. Men can't be like women. We are closer to the primitive fighting period. You are the natural peacemakers."

"Won't you promise me, Howard," Mary urged, as she took his hand and clung to it; "won't you promise me not to—you know what I mean, Howard—not to meet Craig?"

He avoided her eyes; a cold, rebellious look had crept into his own. "I hardly know what to say," he said, suddenly. "You may talk about what women would rather we would do in such affairs, but once let a man follow your advice and you despise him. You don't know why, but you will despise him. You don't want him to be in danger, but you despise him if he shirks it. Mary, I don't want trouble with this man, and I did not seek it. He started the whole thing."

"Oh, but you must promise me," the girl urged, in piteous appeal. "I can't stand it, Howard. I shall not sleep to-night for thinking of what may happen any hour. My father and others say a meeting between you two is unavoidable, and even if you were to—to kill him it would be in a way as bad as your own death. Howard, I am only a weak girl—surely you will not punish me this way. Promise me—promise me!"

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She saw him wavering. She felt his blood throbbing warmly in the hand which clasped hers more tenderly than ever before.

"You are the sweetest girl in all the world," he said; and all at once he felt a strong desire to draw her into his arms and soothe her, to declare undying love for her, and agree to all she asked.

"You can say that—you can say nice things, but you won't promise what I want above all else. Howard, you must not let this thing ruin you. It would mean absolute ruin. You could not go through life with that man's blood on your head. You would be haunted to the grave—reasoning, rational men always are."

Howard pressed her hand again. He smiled gently. "Don't bother," he said; "I may not see Craig again for a long time. I won't look him up. I promise that; I won't put myself in his way, so don't worry any more."

Leaving her mute and still at the gate, Howard walked toward the town in the clear moonlight. Something in Mary's talk had lifted him higher than he had ever been lifted before. He was beginning to realize what she had been and was to him. How different from the cold, unspiritual Cora Langham! What a brave, true, unselfish wife Mary would make—how happy life would be with her as his constant companion!

Ahead of him, outlined in the moonlight, was the roof of Craig's farm-house. The road led past the gate, which was quite near the door. The house was unlighted. Craig lived there alone, attended by a negro woman who occupied a cabin some distance in the rear. Howard paused at the gate. The rage in his heart against the man was rising like a storm. The insulting term Craig had used, and which Howard had been taught that no gentleman could take, rang in his ears. His blood rose, stung his brow, and beat in his veins. He felt for his revolver and found it in his pocket. What better oppor-

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tunity to demand satisfaction could he have? Craig was in the house, doubtlessly asleep. Why not rap on the door, call him out, and demand the apology that really had to come? But he had promised Mary that he would not intentionally meet the man, and he must keep his word. Yes, he would not lie to her after all she had said. He must for a time at least quench the flames within him. He heard a step down the road. Some one approached and passed on the other side. It was a man carrying a plow-stock on his shoulder. In the darkness Howard did not recognize him. For a few moments he stood in sharp struggle with himself, through which Mary's face, eyes, and words were with him.

A rugged hill, deeply wooded, rose in the moonlight near by. He had read of philosophers seeking such places in spiritual stress, and it seemed to beckon to him. Suddenly, and by sheer strength of resolution, he turned sharply away, and, plunging into the wood, began the ascent of the steep hillside. Higher and higher he climbed among the stately pines, plunging through retarding vines, thorn-bushes and briers, till the valley in which the village nestled lay before him. Only here and there lights showed, for the hour was late. The night was oppressively warm. A vast sense of dissatisfaction and unrest lay on him like a weight. Throwing himself down on a heap of sweet-scented pine-needles, Howard gave himself up to keen, even morbid introspection. Never had he felt so discontented. One moment he would be filled with rage at the memory of Craig's bloated face and snarling insults, and the next Mary's suffering appeal would sweep over him like a cooling breeze from Infinity itself. Presently he grew calmer and a drowsy feeling stole upon him. As he was drifting into unconsciousness the thought came to him that he might as well spend the remainder of the night there as in his stuffy room at the hotel, and so he allowed himself to sleep.

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He had many turbulent dreams. One that seemed to stand out more vividly than the others was this: He fancied he heard a horse trotting along the road from Darley to Craig's house. It seemed to be Craig returning home. He thought he heard Craig call out at the gate in a drunken tone to some one. A surly voice seemed to respond, and then there was a sound like the sharp slamming of a door or the report of a gun. This was followed by the beating hoofs of a riderless horse as it galloped off down the road.

CHAPTER XXVII

WHEN Howard waked a beautiful view lay before his eyes. The eastern sky was faintly glowing with the advance rays of the sun. All the earth was gray, dew-soaked, and still. From the bushes within arm's-reach of where he lay, and the low-hanging boughs of trees, spiders had stretched great canopies of shimmering web. Somewhat ashamed of the impulse which had caused him to spend the night in such an unconventional way, he started toward the village, hoping that he would not meet any one who knew him. Indeed, to avoid this he left the main road and took a shorter way through some old fields and meadows. The dew on the tall grass and weeds wet him to the waist, and the dust of the road farther on clung to his shoes and trousers in a thick layer, so he was glad to find few persons on the main street, and entered the hotel from the rear, hoping to gain his room and change his clothing before meeting any acquaintance who would be sure to wonder at his plight.

With a broom in his hand Sugart was sweeping out the office, and as Howard suddenly appeared before him he shrank back as if alarmed. Indeed, he turned pale and leaned on the counter, dropping his broom to the floor and awkwardly bending down to recover it.

"What is the matter?" Howard asked, with a smile. "Do I look as tough as all that?"

"Why, why—" Sugart stammered, as he continued to stare open-eyed. "I thought—we all thought that you—Some said you'd left on the midnight train."

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"Left? Where to?" Howard asked, his astonishment growing.

"I don't know." Sugart was still pale and wore the disturbed air of a man unable to meet a delicate situation. "But the report is out that the sheriff said you'd left. Him and the town marshal was down here together when I got up half an hour ago. They—they asked me if you slept here last night, and when I went up and looked to satisfy them, and found that your bed hadn't been used, and told them so, they said you must have taken a train here at midnight or gone through the woods and mountains to get to the other road."

Howard's indignation was rising. "Did they think that I would actually leave the country?" he demanded. "Is there a man in this town fool enough to think that I would do all that to avoid meeting Fred Craig? I refuse to believe it. Tom, I'm not a coward. I've never been accused of it."

"I don't know anything about it." Sugart was still quite bewildered, and in angry impatience Howard ascended the stairs to his room. Entering it, he was about to bathe his face and hands when a colored chambermaid suddenly entered, and, seeing him in the light from the window, she uttered a sharp scream and beat a hasty retreat down the corridor. What could it all mean? he asked himself, as he changed his clothing. Surely they were acting queerly.

Going down to breakfast at the first sound of the gong, he was met by other surprises. He saw Mrs. Langham in agitated conversation with Sugart at the dining-room door. Seeing him face to face, she started, bowed hastily, and turned away as if anxious to avoid him. At the table, as he sat waiting for his breakfast to be brought, he noticed that the three waiters, with their heads together on one side of the room, seemed to be deliberating as to which should take his order, and when finally one of

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them came he seemed to act more stiffly and awkwardly than was a waiter's habit. And when the food was being brought in Howard noticed that the cook and a couple of dish-washers were peering in at him curiously, but on catching his eyes they at once disappeared.

Further perplexities were before him, for when he had eaten his breakfast and was going out he saw Abner Daniel talking to Sugart in the office. There was no mistaking the fact that Abner was disturbed. Howard had never seen such a woebegone expression on the cheerful old countenance as his friend turned upon him.

"I heard you'd come back, an' thought I'd stop by to see you." Abner's voice shook. "Of course, at a time like this——"

"At a time like *what?*" Howard asked, fixing Abner with an impatient stare.

"Why, why, you see——" Abner began, but he went no further, for several drummers, leaving the dining-room, had gathered around and were gazing boldly and curiously at Howard. "Let's go down to the office," Abner suggested, laying his hand on his friend's arm. "Our talk must be more private. I don't know how much time we've got, either, and the sooner we understand what is best to do the better it will be. Time is valuable."

"You seem to be crazy like all the rest," Howard said, impatiently, as they went out into the street and started down to the office. Just then they saw Pole Baker on horseback, and he reined in at the sidewalk.

"I had started down to see you, Uncle Ab," he said, grimly. "I didn't know Howard was here. So many false reports are in the wind—hundreds of lies mixed up with it. I'll put up my hoss an' come down. You kin both count on me. What's done is done, and thar ain't no use cryin' over spilt milk. We got to git to work an' face the thing."

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"Another fool!" Howard said, angrily. "For God's sake, what is the matter with you all?"

Abner was in such deep thought that he failed to hear what Howard had said. However, when they had reached the office and found themselves alone Howard demanded, fiercely:

"Tell me what is the matter. Why are you all acting this way?"

Abner bent a startled gaze on him. Without a word he stared steadily for a moment, then he faltered: "We must understand each other, Howard. Do you intend to—to deny all knowledge of it? Have you reflected and decided to—to take that course?"

"Good God, what is the matter with you?" Howard repeated. "Come to the point. I'm tired of all this blasted tomfoolery. You all act as if I were a wild beast escaped from a cage."

For another moment Abner continued to stare, then he suddenly took a deep breath, and his eyes lighted up as from faint hope.

"Howard, my boy, didn't you know that Fred Craig was shot and killed on his horse at his own gate last night?"

"Killed—shot?" Howard gasped. "Killed? Do you mean that, Uncle Ab?"

Daniel laid his hand on Howard's shoulder; he bore down on it affectionately and hopefully. "Look me in the eyes, my boy," he said, with emotion, his lips quivering. "I know you won't keep back anything from me, and the truth is important. Did you do it? Forgive me, but so many things point that way. You said you would, on sight; you had the gun to do it with; you passed his house at a late hour; you did not occupy your room last night, an' Sugart says you got in at sun-up all wet an' muddy. Tell me, Howard; tell me the truth. I'm all upset, unstrung, heartbroken. I love you as a son, and the thing is awful serious."

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"I'm innocent, Uncle Abner," Howard declared. "I know nothing at all about it."

"Thank God! an' I believe you." Abner rose, his face beaming with joy, and began to walk excitedly back and forth across the floor.

"So that explains it!" Howard exclaimed. "They all believe it, and shrink from me as if I were a loathsome cutthroat tramp."

Abner returned to his chair. "Now, tell me everything," he said, gravely. "How did you happen to stay out all night? It may be a private matter with you, but still I'd like to know, so as to be prepared in every way, for even as it is, we are goin' to have trouble."

At this juncture Pole Baker came into the office, a riding-switch in his hand, a grim look on his face.

"He didn't do it, Pole!" Abner cried, gladly. "They must look some'r's else fer the man; he ain't here, by hunky!"

"Thank the Lord!" Pole cried, as he looked at Howard and seemed convinced at once. "Somebody else did it; Craig's got enough enemies; but it ain't no soft snap we are in," he added. "It is awful serious. Circumstantial evidence has hung many a innocent man, and I never saw a worse case than this as it looks right now."

"Never mind about that," Abner said, hopefully; "he was just going to tell me whar he spent the night. That's the only thing that mixed me up."

In a low calm voice Howard went over all that had happened to him after leaving Mary till the present moment; he even mentioned the dream in which he seemed to hear angry voices and the report of a gun. When he finished Pole lashed his leg with his switch impatiently.

"Is that all the alibi you kin establish?" he growled. "I believe you, an' Uncle Ab does, because we know you won't lie to us—you couldn't fool us, anyway, with that

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clear eye in yore head; but, boys, facts is facts, an' danger is danger. A jury of plain men ain't goin' to swallow a tale about sleepin' on a hilltop an' dreamin' that some other man fired the shot. It is serious, damned serious, an' we'd as well admit it as a starter. The feller that did the job ain't goin' to come forward and stick his neck in the noose; he'll let the accused man take the medicine if he's allowed to; you bet he will."

"You are lookin' on the dark side," Abner said, though his face had fallen into gravity again.

"Maybe I am, an' maybe I ain't," Pole answered. "I believe in seein' the worst you got to meet at the very outset."

"Well, I tell you one thing," Abner smiled. "Me an' Howard have got to git out this week's issue, and we ain't a-goin' about lookin' fer trouble o' this sort. The law will have to find the man, that's all."

An hour later Pole, who had gone out, returned to the office. If he had taken a gloomy view of the situation before he was even more depressed now.

"What's wrong?" Abner asked, as he and Howard looked up.

"Enough, the devil knows," Pole returned with a sigh. "The coroner's jury has set on the case. Tom Sugart was called on to testify, an' old man Higgins that repaired Howard's gun. Four or five fellers swore that Howard threatened to do it, and, worse than all, Jake Brown testified that he passed Craig's gate about midnight and saw Howard thar, waitin' fer him to git home."

"You didn't say that anybody seed you stop thar," Abner put in, anxiously.

"A man passed while I was at the gate," Howard replied. "I didn't know who it was, and I didn't think he recognized me. Well, well, out with it, Pole, what was the verdict of the jury? I'm ready for anything now."

"It went agin us," Pole answered, gloomily. "As they

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put it, thar was strong probability that you done it. We may as well face the music like men. The Grand Jury will find a bill an' an arrest will be made unless evidence is found beforehand that some one else is the right party."

"Arrest—do you think they would arrest me?" Howard said, his anger rising.

Neither of his two friends replied.

"I see; you think they will," Howard went on. "And, moreover, it may not even be aailable case, and I may have to lie in that dirty jail till the fall court convenes, and all because a drunken—"

"Don't; the feller's dead!" Abner said, reprovingly. "You must keep yore temper, Howard—above all, you must do that now. Bein' mad at sech a time will only make matters worse. You'll lose sympathy by it. I know how you feel, but you must hold in—you really must."

CHAPTER XXVIII

THAT evening, when Abner rode up to the barnyard at Trumbley's, he saw Mary and Mrs. Tinsley at the gate in front of the house and knew that they were waiting for him. Leaving the older woman, Mary came along the fence and joined him as he was dismounting at the bars.

"I thought I'd warn you," she whispered. "Mrs. Tinsley has not heard of the verdict of the coroner's jury. We've kept that from her, but she knows all the rest. She is fairly desperate. She seems to think she has not heard the worst, and is almost distracted. She has done nothing but walk to and fro between her house and ours. Uncle Abner, I don't believe Howard did it. I don't, I don't!"

"I *know* he didn't," Abner answered. "I am absolutely sure of it."

"Oh, I'm so glad!" Mary cried. "I was afraid you might be like all the rest. Hush! there she comes. Be careful what you say."

Through the dusk the old woman advanced till she stood facing Abner. She put an unsteady hand on his saddle. "Whar's Howard?" she inquired.

"I left 'im in the office gittin' ready to go to his supper," was the prompt response. "Me 'n' him worked hard to-day gittin' out the paper, I'm here to state, an' ef we both don't sleep sound to-night it will be because the mosquitoes know the'r business better'n we do our'n."

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"I'm no fool, Abner Daniel," the woman blurted out, a great stare of despair in her eyes. "I know the danger that's hoverin' over my child better'n anybody alive. Till to-day I gloried in the mercy of the Lord. I was grateful for what you did to keep Howard here at home whar I could see 'im now an' then, but this is what even that brief joy has fetched to me. I can't stand it—I can't—I can't!"

Abner's voice was full of clashing currents when he answered, looking down into the storm-swept face. "Yore boy is innocent of that crime, Mrs. Tinsley, an' ef God let's 'im suffer fer it I'll turn agin all that's holy an' good in the universe. The situation may be a little shaky now, but right will prevail in the end."

"That's all you kin tell me, then?" the woman panted. "You say right will prevail. I don't know. I doubt everything now. Nothin' is fair to me, at least. If they dare—dare to put my boy under lock an' key—" But she was unable to speak further. With a dry sob, a high heaving of her breast, she turned and walked away.

The next morning Abner was up with the dawn. Indeed, he had slept little through the night, and was feeling the ill effects of it. He fed and watered his horses, carefully currying and brushing their sleek coats, glad of the opportunity to busy his hands as a sort of vent to his troubled spirit. He was leaving the stable when he saw Pole Baker walking briskly along the road from the village, and he went down to the bars to meet him.

"Whar you been so early?" Abner asked.

"I stayed in town," Pole answered. "I sat up with Howard in his room till after midnight. He had two beds, an' finally persuaded me to bunk with 'im. I'm sorry fer 'im, Uncle Ab—sorrier 'an I ever was fer a young feller in all my day. He was jest headstrong an' worked up when he made the threats he did—a thing that has hap-

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pened to me a hundred times without anything serious comin' of it, an' this is purty heavy punishment."

"I'm glad you kept 'im company," Abner said, plaintively.

"I had to stay," Pole said. "It looks like everybody in town is actually afeard of 'im, an' he's noticed it. Frank Reymond an' some other boys drapped in; but they had little to say, an' all but Frank looked as if they believed Howard was lyin'. What's friendship in time o' real trouble? Not wuth a hill o' beans."

Abner leaned on the bars, sliding his strong thumb-nail under a splinter, slowly prizing it off, and putting it between his tobacco-stained and blunted teeth. "I've been bothered about the Grand Jury," he said. "I wonder ef it will act. Ef an actual arrest is made it will go hard with the poor boy."

"It is sure to come, an' early to-day," Pole replied.

"You think so?" Abner said, despondently.

"Not the slightest doubt of it," Pole went on. "In fact, Howard was watched close all last night. The front and back doors of the hotel was guarded by the sheriff and his deputy."

"How do you know that?" Abner asked.

"I seed 'em; so did Howard. We took a little walk, an' they followed us. Howard looked pale, an' I thought the fresh air would do 'im good. As I come away this mornin' I met the sheriff on the back porch. I know 'im well—I legged fer 'im in his election, an' he would do me a favor ef it come his way. He knows how I like Howard, too, an' I stopped to speak to 'im. I axed 'im straight out ef he thought an arrest would be made, an' he said it had to be sooner or later. I told 'im I was sure Howard wasn't the man, an' both him an' the deputy seemed astonished.

"What do you take me fer?" the sheriff axed. "Didn't I hear Howard threaten to do it? An' wasn't he on the

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spot half an hour before the shot was fired with a loaded gun in his pocket?"

"That's what they all say," Abner sighed. "His own father come over last night about bedtime to see me. I told 'im Howard was innocent, but it went in at one ear and out at the other. He kept sayin' things that showed what he feared. Some folks are that way. They make up the'r mind an' are not open to argument or proof. He kept axin' if the penalty wouldn't be lighter ef Howard pleaded guilty or self-defense. Think of an innocent boy havin' to face sech as that from the man of all men that ort to stand to 'im."

"Well, I must go home an' git my breakfast," Pole said, "then I'll meet you in town. Howard tried to git me to wait an' eat at the hotel, but they hadn't made the fire in the kitchen stove when I got up, an' I'm hungry. Besides, I like home cookin' an' coffee that's just right. Thar's another thing that is odd about me, too, Uncle Ab, an' that is that I never feel right ef I start a day without seein' my children. I want to see 'em all in a bunch at the table eatin' the'r fill. Another odd thing about me is that I hate to come home late at night an' find 'em all asleep. I want 'em to be awake, ef it is jest fer a minute. It seems like something awful has happened ef they don't crawl over my lap an' hug me an' say good night. I don't know—I reckon I'm a womanish feller. Sally—my first wife—used to make 'em say the'r prayers up to the day she died. They 'u'd kneel down on the floor an' say 'em out loud, an' I swear it was as purty a sight as a man would care to see. But Jane comes of hard-thinkin' Dutch stock, an' never had any sort o' religion, an', while she is puore gold in many ways, she don't seem to believe thar is sech a thing as a God or a hereafter. One night when she was away nussin' a sick cousin o' her'n I put the children to bed. I could hardly hold in that night. I got to thinkin' so strong about Sally that—you kin

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believe me or not—but she seemed somehow actually to be thar with her children. The notion struck me that I ort to git 'em to say the'r prayers, an' yit I was ashamed to propose it. I kept fightin' it off like a feller o' my sort will, you know, but it stuck like a leach till finally I gave in. They seemed glad of the chance. The littlest ones had forgot the words the'r mammy had learnt 'em, but the oldest ones remembered an' kept proddin' 'em up till they got through, an'—well," Pole finished with a sheepish look in his face, "ef I had no other evidence of a God, Uncle Ab, I'd know by the way I felt down inside o' me right then that thar not only is one, but He listens. an' makes note o' certain things at certain times."

When Baker was trudging away along the dusty road and Abner, heavy of heart, was turning toward the house, Mary came from the kitchen, a pan of meal dough in her hands with which she was feeding the ducks and chickens which swarmed noisily about her.

"I don't think I slept a wink last night," she said, as she emptied the pan and turned to meet him. "Howard and I have been such close friends for so long that a calamity like this is almost unbearable. You will want to get to town early, I'm sure, and so I'm going to get your breakfast myself. Your coffee is already made, and just as you like it."

They went into the quaint old kitchen, in the wide chimney of which a log fire was burning over a bed of glowing coals. Seeing a strip of bacon on a table, Abner cut several slices and, holding them over the embers on a fork, he broiled them. Mary cut some slices of home-made bread and toasted them, standing at his side.

"Let me fry you some fresh eggs," she suggested. "The pan is hot, and it won't take a minute."

"Thank you," he said; "you are a good gal, Mary; as good as I ever knowed."

"I only wish I were," she faltered, "then maybe God

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would hear my prayers. Uncle Abner"—she hesitated, and then plunged into a confession as frankly as if she had been speaking only to herself—"I prayed a thousand times last night. One thing I prayed over and over till my tongue was dry in my mouth, till my very jaws ached and my knees fairly gave way."

"I know what it was," he said. "You needn't tell me, fer I know. At sech a time, little girl, you an' me could only pray fer one thing."

"But I've been wondering"—Mary fixed her eyes on his melting face as she moved a small table forward for his plate and cup and saucer—"I've been wondering if there is not some great spiritual law at the bottom of what Jesus kept emphasizing—that only prayers made in perfect faith are answered. All through He kept saying that faith was the chief thing—faith cured all sorts of diseases—faith even restored the dead to life. And as I kept praying last night I began to wonder if my prayers were not actually hindered by my awful doubt and fears."

"I catch yore point." Abner had fixed his eyes on her grief-swept face. "That's one of the biggest thoughts in the world. I have tuck notice that when I pray fer a thing an' *know* it is coming, that it always does come, and ef I doubt at all the whole thing falls flat."

"That's it"—Mary suppressed a sigh—"and all last night, while I was praying, something seemed to keep saying to me that wrong had to be in the world, and that in consequence my prayers were falling on closed ears. If I could have believed they would be answered perhaps they would have been, but my fears were so overpowering that—"

"Ah, that's a fact, an' a big, big one!" Abner broke in, with kindling eyes. "Who knows but that was yore supreme test? I think sech trials have to come to all of us accordin' to divine law. Tharin lies the meaning of 'Thy will be done.' It seems awful' unfair to have to bow the

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head before injustice, as we look at it, but ef you or I could rise so high right now as to be able to submit without a murmur even to the worst that might happen in this case we might be nigher to the nature o' God. Another Mary long ago had to stand by an' see her beloved son slowly tortured to death; but look what has come of it—come of it to the whole wide world? Can we doubt that that mother, livin' now amongst the blessed, is satisfied with all that happened? Why, every soul, Mary, that wings its way heavenward through that influence would fall fainthin' with bliss at 'er feet. God's law is right, an' it is more sure to be right at the very time we think it is wrong. I'm shrinkin' back from this here trouble; but even ef it went plumb agin me I'd still try to think God knowed better what was right than me. I come to that way o' thinkin' through a lifetime full o' troubles. Durin' the war lots happened to me that I thought was too hard to stand. But after a while I got to sayin', when anything awful would happen: 'Well, you've passed through sad things before an' still trust in the Almighty; now shoulder this as Job did,' an' that always seemed to help. Did I ever tell you about how my best comrade in war-times died?"

"I don't think so," Mary answered, as she lifted the coffee-pot from the coals on the hearth and refilled his cup.

"Me an' him was nigh the same age," Daniel went on, reminiscently, "an' hardships an' trouble in them awful times tied us closer together. We marched side by side, shared our rations o' hardtack an' salt-pork, an' drank water from the same canteen after his was shot off his back in a skirmish. He was the best, purest-minded boy I ever knowed. His beard was jest beginning to sprout like yaller fuzz on a peach; his eyes was sky-blue, an' his hair was reddish gold. He smiled like a gal. He was an only son of a poor widow, an' she had doted on 'im

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so much that she wouldn't consent to his goin' to war; but he got in with a gang of schoolmates that was goin' an' slipped off an' enlisted. Knowin' that boy convinced me that thar are some persons that are sensitive enough by nature to know when a thing has happened off at a distance, and even be aware beforehand that something important is about to take place. That boy predicted so many things accurately that the soldiers would come to 'im at night an' ax 'im ef all was well at the'r homes an' ef they was goin' to git letters, an' the like. Sometimes he'd make a try at it, an' then ag'in he'd say he wasn't in trim for it. He used to tell me things that he kept back from the others. For instance, I've seed 'im suddenly point out a comrade as we was marchin' to battle, an' heard 'im sigh an' say that he felt sure that particular one would fall before night, an' it come true. Just before the battle at Chickamauga a great change come over 'im. He wasn't as lively as he had always been, encouragin' us with jokes an' pranks an' jolly songs. He looked down-cast, an' had a far-off stare in his eyes. I got uneasy, fer I 'lowed maybe the poor food an' lack o' substantial shoes an' clean clothes had made 'im sick. I tried to cheer 'im up, but he wouldn't smile. Purty soon, when the bugle was callin' us to the front to meet the long blue line that we seed across the hills in the'r splendid clean uniforms an' glitterin' guns an' bayonets, he reached out an' ketched my hand. 'Shake, Ab, old boy,' said he, an' he clung to my hand tight, an' I felt it quiverin'.

"'What's wrong?' said I.

"Then, lookin' me straight in the face, he said, with a husky quiver in his voice: 'I'm goin' to git shot in this battle, Ab. I know it.'

"I tried to treat it light; I slapped 'im on the back, an' told 'im to pluck up; but he stared at me like a person in a dream. He refused to load his gun—said he didn't intend to take human life on the eve of losin' his own.

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'Why,' said he, as ef he'd never thought of it before, 'I hain't a thing agin any o' them men out thar. They are drove jest as we are drove by politics an' head men that are well fed an' safely housed in Washington.'

"Two or three others was listenin', an' they had the saddest faces I ever seed on human frames, fer they loved 'im. They 'u'd 'a' cried ef they hadn't been ashamed, especially the fellers that had left wives an' little children at home an' had a fear o' death. Right then, durin' all that hurry an' turmoil, he wanted to talk about a future life, an', above all, he was troubled about leavin' his mother. 'It will be awful on 'er, Ab,' he said. 'It will go hard with 'er, an' I ortn't to 'a' treated 'er like I did.'

"'It is yore duty to load an' shoot,' said a man who was sorter bitter agin the Yanks, an' hadn't as much heart as the rest of us.

"'I won't do it,' the boy answered. 'The spirits of the mothers of some o' them men are hoverin' over 'em tryin' to protect 'em from harm, an' I'm goin' to join 'em soon. You kin shoot, but I won't. My commandin' officer ain't out thar on a hoss, in a cocked hat an' spurred boots. He is on high, an' He ain't well pleased with this sight, fer His children wear both blue an' gray, an' in this beautiful valley of His creation they are goin' to tear one another like ravenin' wolves.'

"When the battle begun, somehow I'd lost my old fightin' spirit. I didn't take careful aim, an' I sort o' hoped the Lord would guide the balls that whizzed from my gun, an' not hold me accountable, fer I was wrought up more'n I ever had been. He fell as he said he would. I noticed that his gun sorter sagged down as we scrambled along through the briars and broom-sedge in that chokin' stench o' powder, blindin' smoke, an' sound o' human groans an' prayers. I heard 'im gasp an' seed 'im reelin'. I throwed out my hand an' eased 'im down to the ground.

"'Good-by,' he said, with a gurgle; 'that ball went

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clean through me.' Fer a minute I bent over 'im, too full o' grief to say a word, then he plucked up his strength, an' as he clung feebly to my hand he said: 'Tell my mother that I died all right, Ab, an' that I ask her forgiveness. I know I shall meet her again.'

"I left 'im dead on the ground, sprawled out like many o' the rest o' our boys, an' hurried on like a wild thing, hardly knowin' what I was about."

"And you came, in time, to think even that was right?" Mary sighed; "for I've heard you say *all* things are right."

"Yes, even that poor boy's death was right," Abner answered. "Divine order is made to appear twisted to us that we may rise in the effort to straighten it out. That is the only way I kin explain it, fer evil is here an' God is all power an' all justice. I'm goin' to fight fer Howard, Mary, with all my might and main. God may show me a way to help 'im, an' ef He does I'll be ready to take advantage of the chance. I don't know why, but, black as it looks, I have hope of a certain sort. Ef we kin save 'im this experience will be a great lesson to 'im, fer his high temper is about his only fault."

CHAPTER XXIX

ON the morning of the day Fred Craig had fought with Howard at the post-office he had left his bed in the worst of surly tempers. He had been drinking heavily the night before, and, to add to this, the negro woman who usually prepared his meals had sent a little girl to say that she was sick and could not come. He attempted to cook something for himself, but, owing to unsteady hands and general lack of skill, he failed almost totally. He cut his fingers, and scalded his hands with the water he was boiling for coffee. Drinking copiously from a jug of moonshine whisky, his temper grew worse. Carrying a loaded revolver in his hip pocket, and scarcely knowing what he was doing, he shot at a faithful dog, because it ran barking across the yard, and barely missed the animal. He was going to town, but remembered that he was to look at some work being done by Abe Fulton, a rough, unlettered laborer with whom he had often had disputes, in the field back of the house. The work was the construction of a modern barbed-wire fence to take the place of a decayed rail one through which stray hogs recently had been breaking. Craig walked unsteadily across the old furrows of the field to the spot where Fulton was at work. Intoxicated as he was, he yet had sense enough to see that the man had made a great mistake by the irregularity with which the wire had been nailed upon the hard oak and hickory posts. The mistake meant the taking down and replacing of more than a hundred yards of the fence, and Craig was beside himself with rage.

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"I told you plainly that the wires were to stand six inches apart," he railed out at Fulton, with an abusive oath; "here they are ten, there fully twelve. What do you mean! I've a good mind to kick you out of this field. You want money by to-night, do you? You won't get a cent out o' me. Set to work and do this all over."

The laborer laid down his tools, a dogged look of resentment hardening his face. "You was drunk when you told me to do it," he growled. "You don't know what you said—you never do. One minute you say a thing, an' the next take it back. You say I won't be paid fer this—I say I will. Me 'n' my wife need the money for grub, an' I'm goin' to have it!"

"You'll have what I give you *when* I give it to you, not a bit sooner," Craig blustered.

"I say I *will* have it." The glare in the eyes of the workman was that of a demon, and stepping forward, he thrust his hand into his pocket, as if to get a knife.

"Take your hand out of that pocket!" Craig yelled, drawing his revolver and presenting it unsteadily. "Take it out—or I'll blow your head off!"

Abe obeyed, a dull look of animal fear capturing his flushed features. His deep-set eyes gleamed with a suppressed light that was both of fury and caution, and he stood mute and still.

"Ah-ha! you thought you would tackle me, did you, you dirty puppy?" Craig growled. "Now set to work and do that over. You thought you'd jump on me, did you? I'm of a good mind to give you a thrashing that you won't forget in a long time. Thank your stars that I didn't send a ball through you. I will next time you dare to make a move like you did just now."

Restoring his revolver to his pocket, Craig turned and staggered away toward his barn to get his horse. When he had gone a hundred yards he looked back. Abe was staring after him, standing as still as one of the posts he

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had put into the ground. His thoughts might have been worthy of consideration had Craig been rational enough to know it.

Riding home that night after his humiliating encounter with Howard, his bloated face smarting from the blows the younger man had dealt, his brain inflamed with whisky, his mind full of plans for revenge, he gave no thought to the man with whom he had quarreled earlier in the day. At a moment like that a low hireling that depended upon him for a living was not to be thought of. Howard was prominent; Howard was educated; Howard was a man who bore the reputation of being afraid of no one and never taking an insult; the public would wait for the outcome. To-morrow, Craig told himself, he would go to town, meet his antagonist on the street and settle the whole matter. It would be a duel to the death. He would shoot the young upstart down as he would a dog. While these thoughts were hurtling through his befuddled brain his horse was bearing him up to the front gate of his house. There was a clump of mulberry-trees on the opposite side of the road, and out of the shadow of this into the moonlight calmly stepped Abe Fulton, a revolver aimed steadily.

"Hold up yore hands!" he snarled. "Prepare to meet yore God, ef you got one, fer yore day is shore at a' end."

Too much startled to move, Craig sat helpless in his saddle, but his mount, with a quicker sense of danger, reared up and started to run. At this instant Abe fired with the deliberation of a man who had waited long and patiently for his moment. Craig felt a sharp sting over the region of his heart. He made an effort to thrust his heels into the flanks of the horse to keep from falling, but his muscles failed to respond to the demand. He had the feeling of floating in the air, and then all became dark. He slid from his plunging horse as limply as a blanket and lay in a heap on the ground.

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Stepping farther into the moonlight, Abe saw the horse galloping off down the road, and turned to look at Craig. One glance convinced him that the man was dead. Experimentally he prodded the body with his rough-shod foot, then turned and stalked into the woods.

It was a rugged way over which he passed, and in a lonely spot where the thick branches of the trees met overhead and cut out the moonlight he paused to conceal the weapon which still had the faint odor of freshly burnt powder about it. Raising a flat stone, he dug out a little receptacle in the earth and, depositing the revolver in it, he replaced the stone. Then, under the growing sense of a vague terror which he had never experienced before, he trudged on toward his cabin at the foot of the mountain. It was past midnight. He was seldom so late in returning, and yet he had not thought of what his wife might ask or what he might say in the way of explanation. Somehow the deed, justifiable as it had seemed before accomplishment, now was demanding all his thought. To kill that particular man had seemed right enough all through the day; but now that it was done the very moonlight seemed permeated with it—the tiny insects of the woods seemed to know about it and grow silent at his approach. The night was warm, but the sweat of his body had turned cold in his clammy underclothing, and he shuddered.

As he approached the lonely log cabin, such as are given rent free to the lowest class of shiftless mountaineers by land-owners, and which are no whit better than the average stable, he saw that a fire was burning in the chimney and knew that his wife was still up. Trudging forward, with feet which seemed to cling to the earth, he saw her leaning in the doorway.

"Whar on earth 've you been all this time?" she asked, complainingly. "Lord, Lord, I 'lowed you never would come."

He hesitated for a second, then replied:

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"Had to go to town."

"What did you have to go to town fer?"

He was trying to invent a plausible reason, perplexed by her unexpected demand, as he ducked his head to enter the low doorway, but his dull brain seemed unusually unproductive. They faced each other in the red firelight, the bare logs with their mud-filled cracks behind them as a background, the plain, split roof-boards between them and the sky. She was a gaunt, drab creature, with scant hair and sunken cheeks. She repeated her question, and an excuse finally flitted into his mind.

"I was lookin' fer work," he said, averting his roving eyes. "We can't live on nothin'. I'm hungry half the time, an' so are you. I've got to quit Craig, too—I see that plain enough. He's full all the time, an' spends ever' cent he gits on liquor, an' never has none left to pay off hands with."

"Didn't he give you some to-day?" she asked, indignantly.

"Not a cent—not a red cent. That's why I—I say that—"

"You didn't ax 'im, I'll be bound—you are too slow about sech things. Others git the'r money from 'im, even niggers that pick cotton an' plant corn, but you let 'im trample rough-shod over you. Let me go to see 'im. He won't put me off—the scamp. I'll tell the fine gentleman a thing or two about hisse'f. They say he had a fight in town to-day with Howard Tinsley, an' Howard beat 'im up purty bad. Did you see it?"

"No, I didn't happen to be on hand," Abe said, his lip hanging loose, his stare reaching through the doorway out into the shadows of the young pines. "But I heard they had a row o' some sort at the post-office. They've been at outs for some time."

"Did you git you another job?" she asked, anxiously.

"What do you want to know *that* fer?"

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"Because I'm dead tired o' livin' like a hawk or a hoot-owl away out here agin these rocks amongst snakes an' reptiles. I want to have neighbors. You or me could git sick an' die here—actually rot in our beds—an' nobody would know it till the smell called attention to it. Did you git *work*—I want to know?"

"No." He took a deep breath. His eyes still shrank from hers. "Every blessed place is full up. I'm—I'm thinkin' about Alabama. They say big pay is to be had on the new railroad down thar to all that kin swing a pick or lift a full shovel. Ef I could git the money to pay my fare I'd take a trip thar an' look the field over."

"I'd like that," she said, as simply as a child speaking of an unhopèd-for treat; "anything but this here awful loneliness." She went to the fire and put a fresh piece of pine on the flames. It was full of rosin, quickly ignited, and a black rope of smoke curled like a serpent upward into the mud-and-stick flue. There was a sound of cracking twigs outside. He started, leaned forward, and fell to quaking.

"What's that?" he muttered.

"Somebody's cow," she said. "I seed 'er grazin' thar before dark. Her bag was so full she could hardly waddle about. I could 'a' milched 'er an' had some fer yore coffee, but she wasn't mine, an' I let 'er alone. I believe in doin' what's right, Abe. Ef a body lives up to that rule, meetin' or no meetin', I think the Lord will see 'em through somehow. Got any tobacco, darlin'? I'm clean out o' snuff, an' I'm mighty nigh crazy fer some'n'."

Thrusting his hand into his pants pocket, he took out a piece of cheap plug tobacco and handed it to her. Twisting off a small portion, she put it into her mouth and began to chew it. "Now you want yore supper, I know."

He had completely forgotten it, but he nodded dumbly. The stare in his eyes was almost pathetic in its sheer bewilderment. She picked up a short iron poker, lifted

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the lid of a three-legged pot on the coals, and disclosed the remains of a stewed chicken.

"I swapped a pair o' cotton socks I knitted fer it to a peddler that was passin' with a coop of 'em," she informed him. "He picked the smallest in the lot, but it is fat. I jest et the gizzard, neck, an' wings, an' left the balance fer you. My! it smells good, an' it's so tender it falls to pieces when you lift a bone. Then the gravy! Sop bread in it, darlin'. When a'budy is hungry a diet like that can't be beat at a king's table. Ugh, it's good!"

Reaching up to a crude shelf above the fireplace, she took down a cracked plate and a broken knife and fork. He sank into a chair, furtively glancing every now and then over his shoulder at the open door, against which the darkness was massed like a material substance. The plate rested insecurely on his knees, and almost fell, as she began to fill it.

"Hold it still," she laughed. "You are a big baby. I'll have to feed you next. I can't give you any coffee, honey; it's clean out. I was layin' off to git some as soon as you got yore money out o' that triflin' scamp. I'm goin' to see 'im the fust thing after sun-up. I am—I am, I tell you."

"Let 'im alone," Fulton muttered, his mouth full.

"Why do you say that?" she demanded, sharply.

"Because"—slowly, his glance shifting here and there—"because it's my business—not yore'n. I won't—won't have a—a woman dabblin' in my matters. Folks lafe at a feller that—that lets his wife mix up in his doin's."

"Well, you see that *you* git it, then," she yielded. "I don't care, jest so we kin live in some sort o' shape. He's a beast of a man, carousin', card-playin', and ruinin' the property an' his ma's nice old home. I'd think her sperit 'u'd ha'nt 'im, an' sperits do hover about—they do—they shore do when they ain't satisfied. I know a few things, ef other folks don't."

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She prattled on in this wise while he gulped his food down, and when he had finished his meal she sighed wearily:

"Have ye had enough, darlin'? That's all there is t' eat, anyhow. I'm dead tired. I'm goin' to bed. My eyes are so heavy they feel like flaps o' leather. Hurry an' kiver up the fire. That's another thing; we are plumb out o' matches, an' ef we don't keep the coals alive we'll be without fire in the mornin'."

She stepped back to the bed in the corner. It was the crudest of crude affairs, nailed to the wall, and made of hickory poles upon which the bark remained. On it rested a plain tick of straw, one or two tattered quilts, and two flat cotton pillows. In a moment she had disrobed, for she had simply unbuttoned her shapeless dress at the neck and dropped it in a flat coil at her feet. She kicked off her untied shoes, and he heard the side poles creak as she sank upon the bed. He rose, stretched himself, started to yawn, then slowly lowered his arms to his side and stood blankly staring into the fire.

"Kiver the coals, honey," she called out, wearily, turning her head on the soiled pillow to see what he was about. "I'm tired, an' I know you are, too. Fence-makin' an' walkin' to town an' back ain't no easy job."

He formed a grim, distorted silhouette against the diminishing light as he raked with a shovel a trough in the ashes and filled it with coals and embers. Presently the room was dark, save for the spectral moonlight which fell through the open doorway and reached from the sill to the middle of the cabin. He went to the shutter, drew it forward, and began to fumble behind it.

"What are you lookin' fer?" she asked, peevishly.

"Whar's the bar to this door?" he asked, from the darkness.

"You know you burnt it to kindle with that wet day," she reminded him. "What you want it fer? We hain't

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used it sence we been here. You ain't gittin' afeard at this late day, I hope. What have we got, I wonder, that any thief would want? Lord, Abe, honey, that's a good joke! Ah, I see, you think some good-lookin' feller will come an' tote me off. Leave the door open. It's too hot a night to be shet up in a box like this."

Complying, he approached the bed. Sitting down on its edge, he began to undress. She heard his heavy hobnailed shoes drop on the floor, and the sound he made in taking his coarse shirt off over his head. Then with a last glance outside, he lay down beside her. Now that their eyes were becoming accustomed to the absence of the firelight, various things about the room crept into plainer view. The cracks between the logs gleamed like strips of silver set in ebony; white slits showed overhead where the roof-boards had warped, split, and decayed. A cricket under the eaves snarled sharply.

"Pesky thing! Now *you* have set in!" the woman cried. Reaching out, she struck the wall with her fist, and the insect ceased its noise. After that she lay quiet for a moment. She heard her husband breathing loudly through his bovine nostrils, and fancied that according to his wont he would soon be asleep. The air in the room was oppressive, but she was low enough on the animal plane not to object to it. She nestled closer to him. She took hold of the big splaying hand lying inert at her side and fondled it.

"Don't go to sleep yet, darlin'," she said. "I thought I was sleepy, but it's gone somehow. You'll lafe hearty at me, I know; but all day to-day I've been thinkin' of our sweetheart days. La! them was fine times, wasn't they? A body cayn't be young but once, an' when the time is over an' gone forever, it's powerful sad. Abe, sweetheart, you don't pet me like you did then, an' I don't know when you've kissed me. I was different to look at then, wasn't I? Sometimes I try to remember

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my girlish face, pink cheeks, an' yaller fluffy hair that I used to roll in papers the night before a party. Do you remember how you tied my shoe that fust day at the Sunday-school picnic at Big Spring, an' said all them silly things about how little an' trim it was? Do you remember—I know you must, honey—do you remember the purty pale-blue dress I wore that day, an' the sweet sailor-hat that was all the go at that time? You remember how you cussed when Tom Tarley axed me to walk off with him after dinner? La! I didn't care a snap about Tom. I hardly heard a word he said, I was so tickled over the way you glared at 'im. A woman likes that—she does love to see a man git mad on her account. They say Tom's made good on a big ranch out West—owns a thousand head o' cattle an' land fer miles. I could 'a' ketched Tom, I'm purty sure, ef you hadn't had fust claim. He raily did like me; he couldn't hide it. He had sech a honest, boyish way about 'im that all the gals liked 'im. He had sech a great respect fer women, too. I never told you, but I met 'im when he was back home on a visit last winter all spruced up in his fine clothes an' ridin' in a livery team. He looked at me, powerful queer—sorter sad like—an' wanted to talk over old times. He kept sighin' an' sayin' I had changed some in my looks, but that a woman never altered much to an old friend. He certainly has a good heart in 'im. He wanted to know ef I had enough to live on. I believe, on my soul, that he'd 'a' give me some money ef I'd 'a' let 'im, fer folks say Western cattlemen are powerful free with what they got. 'Come easy, go easy,' as the sayin' is. I axed 'im why he hadn't got 'im a wife, an' he 'lowed that he hadn't found any to suit 'im, an' then he said a thing that might sound silly in some, but it didn't in Tom. He said he didn't believe that a man *could* love in the right way more'n once in a lifetime. Well, I don't know how *men* are, but a woman won't. She'd rather live on a dry

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crust an' water with the man she loves than in a mansion with a prince she don't care fer."

Her husband had heard no word of what she was saying. From the insistent drone of her voice his mind was taking desperate flights. Over and over he saw himself, hot with passion, waiting in the shadow of the trees for his victim. Over and over he felt his determined finger press the trigger of the weapon so relentlessly aimed. Over and over he saw the human form fall to the ground and lie limp in the thick dust of the road. Perhaps already some passer-by had found the corpse or at least met the fleeing riderless horse which would lead to discovery. Abe's blood ran cold and sluggishly in his veins. How could he meet the sensation that would surely stir the community tomorrow? Could he look men in the face and calmly talk about it as others would talk about it? Could he speak to his wife about it as if it were a casual occurrence? Suddenly he sat up on the edge of the bed, and with his head between his hands he leaned forward and unconsciously sighed.

"What is the matter?" his wife asked, wonderingly. "Can't you sleep?"

"My head swims around," he said, feebly. "I want more air. I'm goin' outside a minute. This bed is as hot as a bake-oven."

Sitting up, his wife put her hand on his brow tentatively.

"You hain't a speck o' fever," she said, "fer yore forehead is wet an' clammy. What do you want to go outside fer? I don't like to be here by myse'f. You scare me with the way you act to-night—you ain't like yorese'f. Ef you feel dizzy it may be because yore liver is upset a little, an' lyin' still an' quiet will be better fer you than bein' on yore feet."

Without protest he sank back on the bed and stared up at the ceiling.

"Long as you are hot, I'll lie funder," the woman said. "Now, let's sleep. It will make you feel better."

CHAPTER XXX

AS soon as Abner arrived in town on the morning of his conversation with Mary while at his early breakfast, he went to the office. Howard was there already and at work on an editorial. The young man's face was haggard; there were dark rings around his eyes, and his hands shook nervously.

"I see you beat me," Abner said, in an effort at lightness. "You seem to believe that the early mornin' is the best time fer brain-work?"

"Any occupation is better than none right now," Howard said, wistfully; "but there are times that brain-work is next to impossible. Have you seen Pole Baker this morning?"

Abner nodded, and Howard went on hurriedly:

"Then you know that I'm under surveillance?"

Abner nodded again. "That don't make any difference," he answered. "It's only a form that has to be got through with in—in sech matters. A thing like this has to be saddled on somebody, an' the authorities are afeard they won't earn their wages ef they don't make some sort o' pretense o' bein' on the job. At the proper time we'll show 'em a thing or two. The idea of accusin' a man o' yore standin'—"

"Stop! Let's get down to facts." Howard shot a straight stare across his table into the old face bending toward him. "You know I read law for a while, Uncle Ab. Well, I read enough and associated enough with lawyers and judges in my newspaper work, in writing up various

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criminal cases, to know that I am in a mighty tight hole. I am bound hand and foot by circumstantial evidence. I'm afraid that no lawyer in the world could free me. I can see a conviction of my guilt written in every face I meet on the street—I see it in the way they all blink and shrink from me as I pass along." Howard put his pencil down and raised both his hands to his head and sat still for a moment. Then, as Abner was about to speak, he went on bluntly: "I am innocent, and yet my conscience is not clear—not *wholly* clear. If it were I think I could face it better. I did not kill Craig; but I *would* have done it if I had had the chance two hours after my fight with him. Now that he is dead I feel different. I wonder how I could have been so enraged by anything such a drunken, irresponsible creature could have said or done. But my conduct and furious threats will be held against me. This is my punishment. It is tough, but I will have to put up with it."

Abner was so wrought up by this blunt utterance that he was speechless. His kindly mouth was drawn down at the corners, and his lips twitched." He hung his hat up on its nail against the wall, that he might have an excuse for turning his face away. He was longer about it than was necessary, and went on slowly to the water-pail on an inverted box near by and drank from the rusty tin dipper, although he was not thirsty. He felt Howard's gaze following him, and was hardly prepared for what he said when they faced each other again.

"I don't feel so badly about having to go to jail," Howard said, plunging into the subject impulsively. "I don't care if they refuse me bail—and they will, of course; I don't care so much for the fact that all this town and surrounding country consider me guilty; it isn't that that I'm thinking about—that I thought about as I lay awake last night. I'm thinking about you, sir. You put yourself out to buy this paper simply to help me. You gave

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me good advice all along, but I paid no attention to it. Now, what has come of it? Why, with me in the county lockup your investment will go to ruin; with me on the gallows or in prison for life people will sneer at your judgment in backing a wild, harum-scarum fool that you ought to have turned down long ago, and would if you hadn't been the best man in the world."

Almost with a rush Abner stepped forward. He put his hands on Howard's shoulders. He looked into the young man's face while his own filled with emotion. "Don't, don't!" he all but sobbed. "You are too young to comprehend the most beautiful of all God's vast spiritual laws. I must talk plain. I've never had a son, Howard. Ever since I was a young man some'n' in me has been screamin' out fer fatherhood—tellin' me that to be a father was the holiest, highest height a man kin reach on earth. Some'n' else belongs to the law o' fatherhood, an' that is sufferin' through love o' the child. I've had experiences of many sorts in my life, but right now, my boy, lovin' you as I do, an' gloryin' in yore beautiful young manhood an' chance to conquer difficulties, an' as I see you bowed an' broken under this thing I have a realization of my immortality—a sort o' grip on it—that I never had before. This trouble o' yore'n seems to lift me right out o' my body and dissolve me into the very spirit o' God. It seems to me that all will end right somehow ef I fight hard enough an' trust enough. At this moment I'm more like God in nature than I ever was; an' bein' so, I know as God knows, you see, that wrong cannot last forever. I know another thing, an' that is that all Godless folks sooner or later have to acknowledge a great, all-pervadin' spiritual law and bow under it in abject humility. I've watched hundreds of rebellious folks stagger on in defiance with light jokes about deity and the like; but in every case I've seed 'em stricken by grief, loss of fortune, disgrace, or some'n' or other that opened

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the'r eyes. Yore blow has fell early, but it ain't any the less God-sent. You'll weather this storm; it may be a heavy one—heavier than we know of—but you'll sail out of it into calm sea and under clear sky. I'm sure of that, an' yet the pain of it can't be avoided. Every step toward Heaven is fraught with fresh birth-pangs. The one person, you know, that seemed meant fer me as a life companion was taken on the very eve of our union. Up to that minute, my boy, I never knowed what life as a whole meant. Up to then it was bound about with material things. Money, houses, hosses an' wagons, land an' crops, the ability to make a slick trade, to git the best o' my neighbor, was all thar was to it; but after her death—after I looked in vain into her dead face fer what had been thar like sunlight shimmerin' on a delicate flower, drawin' out the fragrance an' scatterin' it to the air—after that, I say, the whole world was changed fer me. I'd been a doubter an' scoffer like some o' yore friends are now, but I couldn't doubt any longer. Her sweet sperit was som'er's—it was too wonderful to be extinct—an' I wanted to link mine to it fer all time. In my search fer light I went to shoutin' religious meetin's. Up to that time I 'lowed all sech excitement was silly; but in my awful sorrow even that was actually a step nigher to God. Ef them folks had been bowin' down to sticks an' stones with sech hearts in 'em as they had, with that dazzlin' hope before 'em, the God I was learnin' to know couldn't turn from 'em. The truth is that He was in every atom of the'r flesh an' bones. The truth is that God, let 'Im be person, essence, or jest principle, can never be like what any book or human bein' has described. When a body comes to me with a fresh religion and explains it, and at the same time admits that it is only one o' ten thousand other beliefs, I know it ain't fer me, as much as I'd like to git the truth; but, on the other hand, I know it is the thing fer the man that holds to it, fer as a rule any belief

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p'intin' upward is better than none. I sometimes think that the reason thar is sech a jangle of various creeds on the face of the earth is that God gives 'em to us the same as we give playin'-blocks to babies. We intend that the babies shall know more'n that about life some day; but the blocks are good enough to start 'em on."

Leaving Howard to himself and saying nothing of his intention, Abner went up to the little street near the court-house which was called "Lawyers' Row," because five or six of the little one-story brick buildings there were used as offices for lawyers. One of these had a tin sign, from which the words "Hamilton Quinby, Attorney at Law," had been almost washed off by repeated rains. The door was open, and Abner went in.

A tall man of fine build, a shock of bushy hair, a sweeping, iron-gray mustache, and a tuft of beard on his chin, stood smoking in the center of the room. On the top of a desk with a rolling cover rested an open leather-bound tome, which the lawyer had been consulting.

"Good morning, Abner," he nodded, closing the book. "Pole Baker said you wanted to see me about Howard's case, an' I stayed over. I have got some minor matters to attend to at Springtown, but they kin wait till later."

"I'm glad you did." Abner eyed the open door restlessly. "Hain't you got another room back thar?" glancing toward the rear. "Thar ain't no use havin' every soul in town know I'm talkin' to you, an' they all look in as they pass. By gum! that woman almost twisted 'er fool neck off just then. Folks is the very dickens to take a mite an' make a mountain of it when excitement o' any sort is in the wind."

"Yes, I've got a consulting-room back there," Quinby returned; and he led the way through a doorway to the smaller room in the rear. Here an outer door and window were open, showing a neglected vegetable garden containing tomatoes, cabbages, peas, and beans on rugged

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poles, and a few stalks of corn, all of which were fairly buried in a riot of weeds.

"Yes, you may think it is a funny thing fer me to come talkin' about Howard before he is even accused," Abner began, as they seated themselves in the plain chairs; "but you'll admit that the situation is bad as it stands. Me 'n' Howard has got to keep that paper a-goin', an' the way folks is a-talkin' is calculated to damage our circula-ti'n. We want to be let alone, you see, Judge"—Quinby had once been a justice of the peace—"an' I 'lowed I'd feel better ef I had a chat with you. It can't do no harm nohow."

Quinby's face was expressionless. He rolled his cigar between his lips, and with his fat fingers pulled at his little beard.

"I read till a late hour last night," he said, in a matter-of-fact tone, as he closed his right eye to cut out the coil of smoke which rose close to the lids. "I wasn't sure myself on all points o' the law, and wanted to be certain o' my ground."

"You don't mean that you—you've been makin' out his case already?" Abner said, in surprise.

"Why, yes, I believe in knowin' as nearly what I'm about as possible. I've been through several cases very much on a par with this, and I ought by this time to know something by experience. As I understand it, you ain't a rich man, an' Howard has nothing. Even if his old daddy mortgaged all he's got he couldn't raise much money, and it would be plumb folly to attempt to make a long, expensive fight and be forced to give in at the end. In every case like this I've advised my client to plead guilty and throw himself on the mercy of the court. Knowing that to be the most sensible way, I'd be committing a wrong by advising a course that could come to nothing but loss to all concerned. Howard is young, and was no doubt provoked to a great extent, and the courts

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are generally disposed to impose a light penalty where a due show of contrition and humility is made at the outset."

"But, Judge, the boy is innocent," Abner said, firmly.

Quinby leveled his stare on the old man's face. It was the calm look he had given many a witness that was being sharply cross-questioned.

"What makes you think so?" he inquired, in the tone of a man of experience humoring one of not any at all.

"Because he says so," Abner returned.

"Oh, he says so, does he? I see, I see. They always do at the outset. They do even to me right at first. You see, Abner, when a feller finds himself in the fix Howard is in he has no time to think; in fact, he has no mind to think with. That's why he needs level-headed legal advice. The first thing I tell them is to keep their mouths shut and to answer no questions—to send everybody to me, and when they come to me I tell them to mind their own business. Oh yes, it is nothing but natural for Howard to take that stand. As a general thing, a feller that commits a deed like that is scared to death. He sees his own end looming up in front, you see, and, being guilty, his imagination paints it a million times worse than it is. Humanity has been taught that to take life is the worst crime possible, and the man guilty of it never can get it off his mind. They will hide it for years, and then own up and take their punishment willingly. I've already inquired into the facts of this case from people that know—Jeff Dill, the sheriff, for instance, and, as I myself heard Howard say, he was going to do it; why—well, you send Howard to me, Abner. He will talk different to me than to you or any other ordinary friend. I'll know how to worm it out of him. When he is assured that his confidence is safe in my hands he will make a clean breast of it."

Abner had flushed slightly. He raised his hand and

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almost shook his finger in the lawyer's face. "I'll tell you one thing," he said, sharply, "an' it's this. Howard 'u'd be a fool, and so would I, to go fer help to a lawyer that sets in adverse judgment on his case before he's even charged with the crime. You'll have to chaw a different sort o' tobacco than you use now ef you want to handle this matter. You are a purty thing to expect a guilty man to pay you all he kin raise to advise 'im to tell the truth. It is the wrongly accused man that needs legal brains to help 'im in a trial like this. Le'me tell you, Judge, you ain't the only good criminal lawyer by a long shot in this state. You think you've got sense; well, le'me tell you some'n'—so have I, an' I know as well as I know that I've got fingers an' toes that Howard Tinsley didn't do that thing. Now, ef yore plan is to browbeat the poor heartbroken boy an' humiliate 'im by contendin' that he's a red-handed murderer he sha'n't come nigh your office. You've got to git different notions in yore head. You've got to drop the scales o' unbelief in the boy from yore blinded eyes, an' use 'em to help ferret out the feller that done the deed."

"I wasn't deciding in advance at all," Quinby defended himself, with rising ire. "I was only using common-sense methods. May I ask if you have thought of the evidence already brought out at the inquest?"

"Yes, I have," Abner answered, bluntly. "I have, but that made no odds, knowin' what I know."

The lawyer's heavy brows met in a belligerent frown. "Do you know of any way that he can establish an alibi—prove where he spent the night on which Craig was shot?"

"No, I don't, if the boy's word won't go," Abner answered. "It goes with me."

"Well, you ought to know that it won't go in court," Quinby retorted, quite angrily. "If you don't, I do. You seem to think a lawyer ought to fight a case on any lines suggested by an excited client. I don't. I lost

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cases in that way when, as a beardless boy, I first hung out my shingle. I've made a reputation for lowering fines and penalties, and I don't want to go backward. I could make myself the laughing-stock of the bar of the whole state if I went against my judgment. I have to be careful as to the cases I take. There are scores of things that could be plead better in this instance than a statement of innocence that can't be shoved down a jury's throat with a crowbar. Howard and Craig could have met by accident, and a quarrel started, out of which grew the fatal shot. Then it would be in the discretion of the jury as to whether self-defense entered materially into the matter or not. A statement from the accused that such was the case, where there was no evidence to refute it, would be likely to influence a sympathetic jury in his favor. If you employ me you'll have to abide by my best judgment. I flatter myself that my thirty years of experience at the bar has given me a knowledge of my profession that no mere outsider could get."

"I see yore p'int," Abner sneered. "Circumstances by accident git tangled about a innocent man, an' he is advised by a high an' mighty legal expert to plead guilty so as to git as light punishment as possible. A feller as miserable as Howard is has to add to his sufferin' by swearin' a lie an' disgracin' his folks to save his neck. I don't know how Howard is; but I wouldn't take advice like that to save *mine*."

"I'm afraid you are unreasonable," Quinby retorted, loftily. "I haven't said yet that I thought *positively* that Howard was guilty."

"No, but you said some'n' jest as bad," Abner flared back. "You intimated that you was goin' to put the boy on some sort o' rack to make 'im own up. Now, ef I owe you anything fer yore advice—sech as it is—you may send me yore bill; but I'd cut off my right arm ruther 'n trust Howard's life in yore hands, or let you make 'im

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feel worse 'n he does. You've already made up yore mind that he's guilty, an' I won't hire you fer big pay to stand up in court an' show what you think."

"I didn't ask for the case, understand that." Quinby was now flushed with fury. "And, moreover, when it has been threshed out in court on any other line, you'll regret that you didn't listen to me. You don't owe me a cent. You are a farmer, Abner, not a lawyer, and you have let your emotions run away with you. Now that I'm out of the case I'll speak more plainly. That boy shot Craig—and he shot him deliberately and in revenge. He said he would do it, armed himself, and was seen at Craig's gate half an hour before the killing. He started to escape through the woods. He spent the remainder of the night tramping about, no doubt half crazy; then, at the break of day, he resolved to deny all knowledge of the crime, and came back to town and washed up and changed his clothes. If he had been sensible enough to realize the evidence that would pile up against him he would have continued his flight. It is a pity, but he will no doubt be advised to fight the thing by men like you, backed up by some shyster lawyer who is out for the money. I'm glad I'm out of the case."

"So'm I, Judge." Abner rose and put on his slouch hat. "I've got a terrible hard fight before me, an' I ain't lookin' fer yore sort to help."

More despondent than he had been since the discovery of the crime, Abner started for his office. A bell in the steeple of a distant church was tolling, and, crossing the street a couple of squares below, he saw a crude hearse followed by a few buggies and carriages slowly moving toward the cemetery on a red hill to the west. It was the burial procession of the murdered man. Abner saw some of the storekeepers step out on the sidewalk in their shirt-sleeves and stand gazing at the procession thoughtfully.

Just as he was about to ascend the stairs Abner met

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a young man coming down. It was William Barnett, a rising young lawyer, whom Abner had known from his boyhood.

"Hello, Billy!" Abner greeted him warmly. "Whar've you been? I hain't seed you fer a month."

"Been away on business," the lawyer answered. He was of medium height, rather slender in build, and florid complexion. He had a face that indicated the possession of rare intelligence, a clear, blue eye, and active body. "I'm about to induce some big cotton-mills to locate at Darley. Yore paper has started a boom, Uncle Ab."

"I hope so," Abner answered, listlessly. "You've heard of Howard's trouble, I know."

"Yes, hurried home on that account," Barnett answered, his face falling into gravity. "I've just been up to see him. He and I are very close friends. Roomed together at college and been chums ever since. We used to share our pocket-money between us. Uncle Ab, this thing has hit me hard. You see, I know from experience what a sensitive fellow Howard is. He almost cried up there just now. I tried to cheer 'im up with my cotton-mill news, but he hardly heard what I was saying. He blames himself for getting you and his family into such great trouble."

"Do you think an arrest will be made?" Abner faltered.

"Oh yes, there is no getting around that, and it will happen at any minute now. The Grand Jury has found a bill. The sheriff is only delaying because he likes Howard and hates to take action. Yes, it is awful, Uncle Ab, for an innocent young man to be accused—"

"Then you think he is innocent?" Abner exclaimed, gratefully.

"I not only think it, but I *know* it," Barnett returned. "Anybody that looks in Howard's face can see the truth beaming out of it. Knowing him as I do, I'd take his word for any statement that he would make. I don't

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believe he ever lied in his life. He's true blue, and finer now under this cloud than he ever was. God knows this is terribly unfair, Uncle Ab. He has a temper that he came by honestly, and it was nothing but natural for him to resent Craig's insulting remarks. I'll lose faith in the universe if this goes against him. There is something I wanted to say to him, but I was afraid it might hurt his feelings. Uncle Ab, I owe Howard for a thousand kind acts in the past. I have saved up some money, got nobody to support, and if you need any cash I want you to come to me for it. Just let it be between you and me. Howard needn't know about it, but I want to help."

Abner's eyes grew moist. He caught the young man's hand and wrung it. "We won't need no money," he gulped; "but we need a lawyer that believes in 'im. I've talked to one old hog that thinks the boy's guilty. Billy, you are the only man in the state that I'd trust the case to. Will you take it?"

"I'll do my best," Barnett said, taken aback somewhat. "If giving my whole soul to it will win, I'll succeed. Howard is innocent, and somehow I feel like I could make any twelve men in the world believe it. I see now that bail won't be allowed, and our friend will have to stay in jail till October court unless we can find the real criminal. The officers are so sure that they have the right man that they will let the other slip through their fingers. We must do some detective work on our own account. It is the only thing that will do us a bit of good."

CHAPTER XXXI

ENTERING the office a few minutes later, Abner saw Howard still at his table; but a glance sufficed to convince him that the young man was unable to concentrate his mind upon his work. Abner paused behind him and looked over his shoulder. This is what he saw as the beginning of an article:

OLD DARLEY ON A BOOM! BIG COTTON-MILLS TO
LOCATE HERE! A NEW RAILROAD TALKED OF!

Abner sighed, and, looking up, Howard caught his eye.

"Ef I was you I'd not bother about that fer *this* week's issue, anyway," the old man faltered. "I hate to say it, my boy, but I reckon we ort to lay sech things aside fer a while, an'—"

"You mean because—I see, because—" Howard's voice trailed away in waves of despair.

"We'd as well face the truth, bad as it is," Abner said, his tones full and round.

"But I want to do my work," the young man declared. "I've undertaken to help you run this paper, and I oughtn't to let a—a false charge of any sort stop me. Your money is in it. I'll keep on if I work in jail—in jail, do you understand? It won't be the first time a fellow has written under such conditions. The worst part of it is, however, that you deserve a different sort of reputation for the paper than that it is edited by a man accused of a terrible crime."

"Don't talk that way—don't!" Abner cried. "Some'n'

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has got to be done, but what I don't know yet. Work is before us of a different sort than gatherin' an' distributin' news."

Howard laid down his pencil and stood up. His face, in its bloodless cast, was almost gray in color. He moved to one of the front windows and looked out.

"I see the sheriff and Jim Tibbs, his deputy, in front of the livery stable. They are looking this way and talking to a group. They will be here in a few minutes. There is no use trying to hope otherwise. I've been fighting it off all day. I am sure that the Grand Jury has already ordered my arrest. Billy Barnett wouldn't say so; but I read it in his eyes. I think I see it in yours, too."

Howard had suddenly faced the old man. Abner shrank from his dull stare, but said nothing.

"I see," Howard muttered, in what was almost a groan. "They are not even going to give me personally a chance to work up proof of my innocence. I'll be wholly dependent on my friends, and that hurts—that cuts to the quick, but above all—let me say it now, Uncle Abner—I shall think more of your pain, and my mother's, than all the rest put together. I've been trying to put a brave face on it, but I am losing faith in justice. Some one is now hiding behind the charges against me. That person is free to come and go as he will. Many an innocent man has suffered for crime he never committed; why should I not also?"

"You won't suffer long," Abner gulped. "Me 'n' Billy an' Pole Baker will turn the earth upside down or find the guilty man. All we want you to do is to be patient an' trust us. Keep yore soul pure an' sweet under this calamity. Why it has fallen on your young head I don't know, but I still believe in the goodness o' God, notwithstanding. Even this, black an' unreasonable as it looks on the surface, must have infinite design behind it. It must—it must!"

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There was a step on the stair below; another joined it. Some persons were coming. They were walking slowly, and making as little sound as possible.

"They are coming," Howard said.

"Yes, that's them," Abner agreed. "Remember, fer all you do, don't make a fuss—don't git mad an' resist the law."

The next minute Jeff Dill, the sheriff, a tall, thin man of middle age, and Jim Tibbs, his deputy, a young man, came in, their faces set grimly. Dill let his shrinking glance fall on Howard's steady eyes.

"I reckon you know why we've come, Howard," he began, awkwardly.

Howard nodded. "Yes, I know. Don't apologize, Dill. You have to do your duty."

"The Lord knows I hate my part of it," Dill went on, with averted eyes. "Nobody knows better 'n me an' Jim here what a tough customer Fred Craig was. Ef you hadn't done it somebody else would have been sure sooner or later to—"

"Stop!" Abner flared up. "That's a purty way fer an officer to talk. Howard ain't been found guilty yit, thank God, an' until he has been so found you nor nobody else has a right to talk like thar was no sort o' doubt about it."

"I'm sorry," Dill said, in no little confusion. "It is reported out in town that Howard has admitted it to several, an' naturally I thought—"

"Well, he hain't admitted it to nobody," Abner fumed. "He's as innocent of it as I am. You kin hear black is white in a town full o' tattlers like this un. Folks want to believe the worst they kin agin anybody that's tryin' to do right an' rise above the common level."

"Never mind, Dill," Howard put in, bravely. "It is natural for you to believe I did it, and no harm has been done. I'm ready to go with you."

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Dill fumbled a parcel wrapped in brown paper and tied with a piece of twine. As he unrolled it the links of a steel chain clinked and a pair of new handcuffs came into view.

Howard eyed them, a look of aversion creeping into his face. "Will that be necessary?" he asked, forcing a smile. "I don't intend to try to—to get away."

"I'm afraid it is, Howard," the sheriff returned. "Of course, thar is no actual need of it in yore case, but the law orders—"

"Oh, it's all right!" Howard said, quickly. "I am no better than any other prisoner." And as he spoke he extended his arms. He was wearing a thin office-coat, and Dill glanced from it to another hanging from a nail on the wall.

"If you want to put on yore other coat," he said, "you'd better do it before the cuffs are on. You can't git yore arms through the sleeves unless you do."

"I see." Howard's eyes met Abner's. The old man's held a stare that was too full of pain to be described. He turned aside as Howard was putting on his other coat.

"Do you happen to know if my mother is in town?" Howard asked the sheriff.

"No, she ain't yet," was the reply; "but somebody passed yore pa an' her on the road just now a mile or so back, an' that's why me an' Tibbs decided to hurry. I didn't think you'd like to let her see you go through town like this."

"You are right," Howard answered. "Thank you, Dill. Let's go now."

Abner remained in the office. As the clatter of steps died away from the stairs, and the fainter ones from the sidewalk below, he sat down at his table and raised his hands to his dead-white face.

"Lord God Almighty," he prayed. "Thou who rulest the universe an' taketh account o' the happenin's on all

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Thy countless planets, as well as on this tiny ball o' our'n, give me faith, strength, an' courage in this black hour. Keep me, O God, from denouncin' Thee outright—or denyin' Thy existence. Help me, help me! fer I'm totterin' on the brink o' blackest unbelief. Let me cry now, 'Thy will be done!' fer Thou art right, an' this great wrong is blindin' me—chokin' me. 'Help Thou my unbelief!' Give me strength an' show me the way to right this awful wrong agin that pore boy, who shorely is *Yore* child ef anybody is."

There was a light step at the door. Some one came in, and, looking up, Abner saw Lizzie Swayne putting her hat on a shelf above her desk. She was wiping her eyes and sobbing softly.

CHAPTER XXXII

THE news of Howard Tinsley's arrest spread rapidly through the town and out into the country. Nothing else was mentioned where persons would hail each other on the roads or meet face to face in the streets.

"What a pity, and so young and bright!" was heard everywhere. Well, it was his high temper, and no doubt he was greatly provoked, for his victim was notoriously bad. Will he be hanged? That's the question, or will influence and "pull," money and sympathy for his family and his youth finally save his neck? No punishment lighter than imprisonment for life could be thought of in such a case, and even that might be refused.

Some of Howard's social friends were gathered in the old-fashioned town hall at a rehearsal of a drama, which was to be given in benefit of a fund which was being raised to improve the condition of the Confederate Soldiers Graveyard, which, full of unmarked mounds, lay just outside the town.

Cora Langham had agreed to take a part, and with some of the other players sat in the auditorium when Frank Reymond came in hurriedly.

"It is all up with Howard," he announced. "They've just taken him on to jail."

Cora turned white and had a sensation like that of fainting; but so great was the interest in what Reymond was saying that no one noticed her condition. That part of the cast who were behind the cracked and marred scenery studying their lines left the stage and gathered

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around Frank, listening breathlessly to his description of their friend's humiliation. The young ladies as a rule stood out for Howard's innocence, but the young men remained silent.

Presently the stage director called them to order, and those who were needed went behind the scenes. Cora found herself alone with Reymond.

"I'm telegraphing it to all my papers," he said. "It is a big item. Editors all over the state are watching Howard's work and quoting him. My papers will take all I can give them on the subject. I'd like to stay longer, but I must go."

When Reymond had gone Cora managed to leave the hall unnoticed. She had never felt so queer before; in fact, she was half dazed. At the foot of the stairs she met her mother, who had come for her.

"I want to see you, dear," Mrs. Langham said, in suppressed excitement. "Let's go to the hotel. Hold your head up. Don't you see that group at the post-office? They will all be looking at us."

"Why should they look at us?" Cora asked, listlessly.

"Because they will; they even stared at me, and when they see us together they will stare more than ever. Come on; I'll explain what I mean later. Don't look at them. You've got yourself into this, now you've got to get out of it."

"I don't know what you mean, mother?" Cora said, feebly, as she was hurried across the street, which was well filled with wagons and vehicles from the mountains.

"Well, I know what I mean, if you don't," Mrs. Langham answered, impatiently. "Come on!"

It really seemed true that many of the bystanders in front of the stores, those who lived in town at any rate, actually did stare at the beautiful girl as she passed. Several drummers at the hotel entrance, as they stood aside with lifted hats for the ladies to enter, eyed her with curi-

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ous attention. Mrs. Langham led her daughter straight to her room, and when they were inside she closed the door and sank into a chair, panting from her rapid walk.

"What is it, mother?" Cora demanded, her own words sounding as vague as if they were spoken in a dream. "What did you come for me for?"

"You ought to understand, Heaven knows!" Mrs. Langham cried. "Haven't you heard about Howard Tinsley?"

"Yes; but what—"

"Well, you have ordinary sense, I'm sure," Mrs. Langham flared out. "This whole town and a few even down at home have been connecting your name with that boy's for the last two months. I said nothing, because you've had harmless affairs with all sorts of young men everywhere we've ever spent the summer. But this is different. You've entertained him at our house. The Atlanta papers, because he was a sort of editor, made mention of his visit to us. We are tied up in this terrible affair, I tell you. Your father will be furious enough to disown you, for if there is anything he would hate it would be to see our old and respected name bandied about. He will hear it everywhere and curse the day you were born. He has indulged you a lot, but I never let him know of all your affairs. If he had known the way you amuse yourself he would have kept us at home. Folks are saying—folks right here in the hotel are actually asking me if you and that young jail-bird are not engaged."

Stunned beyond utterance over what had happened prior to this tirade, Cora sank into a chair near a window. She could think of only one thing now, and that was the calamity which had befallen her friend.

"Why don't you talk? Say something, for God's sake!" Mrs. Langham groaned. "What are we going to do?"

"Do? Why, mother, what *can* we do? It is not our fault. We can't help what—"

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"We *can* do something, and we *must* do something, and without delay!" the older woman broke in. "We can pack as quickly as possible and get away from this silly town. The papers will announce our return to Atlanta, and the public will at least know that we are not here backing the man up, no matter what the gossips may try to make out of his past attentions to you. If we stay here they will say you are heartbroken, and who do you think would care to marry a girl under a cloud like that?"

"So you would have me turn against him the moment he is in trouble," Cora answered. "Howard will know why we left town, and that will add to his humiliation. He may be innocent, mother. They say he denies it outright."

"Of course he would deny it! What fool wouldn't, under the circumstances? Don't argue with me, Cora. I'm your mother, and right now I have a clearer head than you have. You will live to see the day you will be glad I forced you to be sensible. We've got to get away to-day on the first train."

Cora lowered her face to her slender white hands and was silent.

"Do you mean to say that you actually *want* to stay?" Mrs. Langham exclaimed, rising and striding heavily to her daughter's chair and standing over her.

"I don't know what I want," Cora muttered, despondently. "I don't—don't know how I feel toward him. I don't know my own heart. I don't know that I have a heart like most girls; but I know I am sorry for Howard, and do not want to accuse him by running away like this. His other friends"—Cora was thinking in dismay of Mary Trumbley—"will not turn against him."

"What if they don't?" burst from the desperate matron's lips. "What have they got at stake? Who ever heard of them outside of this little town? It is different with you. The papers will want to make as much sensa-

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tion as they can out of it. I see the line they will pursue. They will say that a popular Atlanta girl is staying here to be near to him—taking flowers and delicacies to his cell every day. You've got to be sensible. I tell you you are in an awkward place. We've got to act at once, and, moreover, if the slightest reference to you comes out in the papers, we must promptly deny here and at home that you are in any way connected with that fellow."

Out of breath Mrs. Langham paused. Cora sat mute, pale, and almost quivering for several minutes. Then she arose. She drew herself up to her full height, and, going to her bureau, she looked at her face in the mirror. Taking up a powder-puff, she applied some pink powder to her cheeks and gently touched it with her handkerchief. Dampening a tip of her finger at the neck of a cologne-bottle, she stroked her arching eyebrows.

"Mother," she began, more steadily than she had yet spoken, "you are right. I see it—I know it. To be frank, I have never yet thought seriously of marrying Howard Tinsley, even if he had proposed to me, which he has never done. If you were a girl of my own age, and quite sympathetic, I could more fully explain. But I suppose the fact that Howard always held aloof in such a manly way did interest me more than the other men, who can only pay compliments and talk of love and admiration. Then there is another thing, and I've thought of it a good deal, and that is this: Through it all, somehow, I have felt that if I really were sufficiently unselfish to marry Howard he would feel it and allow himself to care more for me. I think he knows why I hold back. He knows it is because I shrink from his poverty and consider my social position better than his. He is noble enough to despise that weakness in me. I don't thoroughly know myself. There are moments when I want—actually want to be unselfish enough to throw you, society, and every-

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thing else to the winds and let him know it was for his sake."

"You don't love him," Mrs. Langham broke in, hotly. "If you did you would not be weighing the whole thing as you are doing. At any rate, you know he is out of the question now. Surely if you hesitated before this thing happened you can't any longer. You've got sense enough to see that. He did have an opportunity to rise, as many self-made men have risen in life, but that opportunity has been taken from him. They tell me he hasn't a chance of getting out of this trouble."

Cora faced her mother calmly. "Yes, I've got to decide—I've got to be sensible and have it over with," she said, deliberately. "He and I are not engaged. He has never even said in so many words that he loved me. It was just a game, mother; but it was the most interesting one I was ever in. I know his worth, and if he were to tell me he is innocent I'd believe him. I have been spoiled all my life, but I long for something more genuine and deeper than I have ever had. Every other man that is attracted to me has been attracted by my position and money, but it was not so with Howard. All along I have seen that he despised what I have. All along I have seen that if I could have thrown it away and become, of my own volition, as poor as he is for his sake, he would have loved me. But I am not unselfish enough. There is a streak of the practical—the habit of grasping the safe side—in me which came from you or father, or both, that holds me in check. You needn't be afraid that I will act foolishly. I loathe myself for it, but when I heard of the murder and the likelihood of Howard's arrest my first thought was of *myself*. I was here in this room when the chambermaid told me about it. I was shocked, but at once I thought how terrible it would be to have it known in Atlanta that he was one of my most intimate friends. Now, you see how little there is for you to worry over.

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I shall look out for our interests as carefully as you would."

"You've got a lot more sense than I gave you credit for having," Mrs. Langham breathed, in relief.

"I have less heart, that's all," Cora said, bitterly. "I begin to think that the possession of material advantages in life means doing without something finer and more lasting. I got that from Howard. He reads, and I don't. I'll either not marry at all or I'll marry without deep love or even admiration. Mother, Mary Trumbley—the girl you admired—loves Howard unselfishly. She would go to jail with him to-day if she had a chance. It may be that he will establish his innocence; it may be that she will help him do it, and then—"

"They will marry and be happy ever afterward." Mrs. Langham made the jest in sheer elation over her daughter's precaution.

"Yes," Cora replied, "and prove by a life of genuine happiness and wholesome simplicity that the thing you and I strive for and hold to so tightly is worthless—absolutely worthless. But that is neither here nor there," Cora sighed. "All of us who are born to the possession of means enough to insure us a life of empty idleness simply go without a higher life. I heard a sermon once about Christ and the rich young man. I now see that the young man was simply bound hand and foot by the belief that he could not do without the very things I am clinging to. Christ was doing without wealth, and He knew the spiritual freedom of it. You and I and father and all our set in Atlanta are slaves. A person striving to acquire money would laugh at this statement; but one striving for spiritual possessions would know what I mean. I am swaying between two desires. I'm tired and sick—young as I am, I'm tired and sick of the life we live. The lives of these mountain people contrasted to my own make my heart ache from sheer emptiness.

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Something tells me that if I had been born here of poor parents, Howard Tinsley and I, in fighting the obstacles of life side by side—”

“For Heaven’s sake, what is the matter with you?” Mrs. Langham interrupted. “You are not like yourself.”

“I really don’t want to be like my *old* self,” Cora answered, her pretty lips twitching. “But you need not be afraid. I shall do as you wish. I shall do it because there is nothing else for a woman in my position to do—because, in a sense, it is my duty.”

“Then we’ll pack up at once,” Mrs. Langham said, with a deep breath.

“No; listen, mother.” Cora turned square around. “I am able to see both sides of the matter. If I were to give up my part in the play that the young people are getting up and run off to-day, there really *would* be room for talk. If we stay on here and act as if we have no vital connection with the—the awful affair, no one will dare to—to connect my name with it either here or down at home.”

“You may be right,” the older woman agreed. “Now that I think of it, your father would wonder why we changed our plans, for I wrote him only the other day that we’d stay another month.”

“Yes, we’ll stay,” Cora said, firmly. “Now, I’m going back to the hall. They will need me to go over my part with the rest. Mother, you can trust me. I sha’n’t make a fool of myself.”

CHAPTER XXXIII

ON the morning of Howard's arrest Mrs. Tinsley was in the big kitchen washing up the dishes which had been used at breakfast. Over her head from the smoke-browned oaken rafters hung strips of bacon, hams, strings of sausages in guts, and corn husks, gourds, and pepper-pods. She was brushing the hearth with a huge bunch of broomsedge wrapped tightly with a string, when her husband came from the stable-yard, an empty slop-pail in his hand.

"Well, have you changed yore mind?" he asked, impatiently. "I don't want to argue with you any more about it. When I give in, I give in plumb, but I see the thing exactly opposite to you. A man's been killed. Busybodies all abouts are tryin' to fix the crime on somebody, an' they picked the one that they thought was the most likely, an' nothin' kin stop the waggin' of the'r tongues. But that ain't the main p'int. Here we are—you an' me—Howard's pa an' ma, an' because of all this powwow you rolled an' tumbled in bed all last night, an' now declare you want to hitch up an' hustle right off to town, a thing we don't usually do without good reason. What will folks say—what will they think? That's what I want to know. Why, they will all say, 'Jest look at the Tinsleys—thar they go helter-skelter to town because they know the'r boy is in serious trouble.'"

"I don't want to talk no more." Mrs. Tinsley turned an ashen face upon him. "You needn't go unless you want to. You don't have to hitch up the buggy. I kin

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walk—I've done it time after time. Yore skull must be thick ef you don't see the danger Howard is in. I don't have to look any further than Abner Daniel's face to prove it. He draps his eyes when he talks to me an' tries to speak encouragin', an' Mary Trumbley kin hardly keep from cryin'. She is a sweet, good girl, an' she loves Howard. She an' Abner are keepin' back something. I don't know what tuck place at the inquest, but I believe Howard's quarrel with Craig was mentioned."

"It don't make no difference whether it was or not," Tinsley argued. "A coroner's jury has a duty to the public at large to perform. They have to p'int out suspicious-lookin' circumstances in a case like this, an' it remains fer the Grand Jury to take action or not, as it sees fit. You kin hear a lot about the matter that hasn't a smidgen o' fact behind it. A Grand Jury is a body sworn to close secrecy, an' yet tattlin' fools like Tobe Trumbley will know what they done in private session before they even disband. Now, Tobe says—" Tinsley paused, remembering his wife's nervousness, and stood looking across his wheat-field toward the mountain.

"What did Tobe say?" Mrs. Tinsley leaned her broom against the chimney and stared open-mouthed.

"Why, the fool said that he knowed positive that a true bill had *already* been found agin Howard; but, la me! anybody that will listen to what Tobe Trumbley says had as well—"

"I knowed it was comin'," Mrs. Tinsley broke in, tremulously. "A mother kin tell when danger is broodin' over her young. Hitch up the buggy while I git my bonnet. Ef you think I'll stay here piddlin' about while they are draggin' my child to jail you don't know me. Ef the buggy ain't ready in five minutes you kin overtake me on the road, or you kin stay."

"That's final, then?" Hiram said, in disgust.

"Yes; I'm goin'," was the answer. "You kin go or stay."

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"It will upset everything here," Hiram growled. "Two fellers are goin' to cut an' stack hay fer me after dinner, an' ef I ain't here to take a hand an' watch 'em they'll idle in the shade half the time. But they will want full pay all the same. Now, ef you'd jest wait till—"

But she was not listening, and with a shrug of impatience he turned to the stable to get his team ready. Fifteen minutes later he drove up to the front door, and as he sat smoking his pipe he called out:

"Well, come on! I reckon you'll keep *me* waitin' now!"

There was no answer. He called out more loudly. Still there was no sound from within. Then he noticed that the door was shut and the green window-blinds were closed and fastened. Looking down the hot road, he saw the figure of a woman trudging along in a cloud of dust, her head hanging low.

"Humph, thar she is!" he grunted, and, shaking the reins over the back of his horse, he followed after her. Half a mile farther on he overtook her. There was a dumb stare almost like that of terror in her fixed eyes as she put her toil-hardened fingers on the dash-board and drew herself up to a seat beside him. They had started on when Hiram bethought himself of something to say.

"At a serious time like this"—he cleared his throat as he always did before making a deliberate statement to his Bible class—"at a time like this Scripture tells us—in fact, the admonition is from Saint Paul—he tell us that—"

"I don't want to hear what Scripture says!" she fired back at him. "You begin that, an' I'll git out an' walk. Nothin' written away back thar will do me a speck o' good—inspired or not inspired. I want to know ef my child is goin' to be treated worse than a dog. A dog don't like to be housed up in a box, an' it's jest a dog. When folks stick a high-minded, high-strung, proud young sperit into a public place of punishment fer a thing he

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never done it is time *new* Scripture was got up. A cluck-in' hen will fight fer her young, although her flesh was created fer sech stomachs as yore'n to fill up on. I'm goin' to fight fer my boy. God may desert 'im—God may have piled all this on 'im jest fer gittin' mad at the insults of a red-faced, bloated blackguard that's better dead than alive, but I'm going to stick to 'im."

"You are makin' a mountain out of a mole-hill." Hiram did not know if the quotation was biblical or less sacred, but he made use of it. "As fer my part, I ain't so mighty sure that the boy will even be tuck up."

She made no reply, and in silence they drove on into town. At the public wagon-yard they got out. Hiram took his horse from between the shafts and looped up the leather traces so as not to impede the animal's movement while remaining hitched to the long rustic rack. They were coming out of the wide gate to the sidewalk when they saw quite a throng of citizens turning a corner of the street which led to the court-house and jail. It was made up of men, women, and children, white and black. A little white girl recognized the Tinsleys and stood staring at them almost in awe. She retraced her steps to a group of school-children, said something excitedly, and the children all approached and eyed Mrs. Tinsley curiously.

One of the children, a little girl, had been to the Tinsley farm with her mother to spend the day a few months before, and she left her companions and came forward and timidly took the old woman's hand.

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Tinsley," she faltered, "and so is mother. She went with the crowd, and I saw her crying. She says it is a shame."

"Went with the crowd—whar to?" Mrs. Tinsley's words fell dead from her lips.

"To the jail," the child said, wonderingly. "Didn't you know? They took Howard up there just now."

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Hiram had heard. His glance roved over the busy street. He saw the groups here and there all looking at him and his wife. Mrs. Tinsley had released the child's hand. She drew her sunbonnet down over her eyes.

"Well, whar you bound fer now?" Hiram asked, bereft of his usual resource.

She said nothing, turning automatically toward the street leading to the jail. She moved her feet clumsily; at times they seemed to drag on the uneven brick walk. Once or twice she stepped on the front part of her plain black skirt, and she drew it up and held it tightly. At the corner of the street stood a group blandly watching her and her husband, and they fell back respectfully to let them pass. She kept her face down, but Hiram bowed and nodded to several acquaintances, while he thrust his hand into the pocket of his short coat for tobacco, which he began to cram into his pipe with his blunt forefinger.

At the gate in the iron fence surrounding the jail, which was a large, red-brick structure three stories in height, they met Henry Lapsley, the jailer, a young man whom the Tinsleys had known from childhood. He held the gate open, and as they entered the yard he said, sympathetically:

"I reckon you want to see Howard. It is all right, I guess, fer you to go in; but I'll have to make sure. The law is sorter strict in serious cases like this. My understanding is that a prisoner's lawyer has the right to admit anybody he sees fit. Abner Daniel has engaged Billy Barnett for the defense, an' he's in the clerk's office now. I'll go ask him what to do. I see my wife at the door. Go right in, Mrs. Tinsley, an' take a seat. I'll be right back. Thar ain't no cells on the ground floor—all that's reserved fer the use of me an' my family. Howard's up one flight."

Nodding mutely, Mrs. Tinsley passed on to the door, where Mrs. Lapsley, a plainly dressed young woman,

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stood waiting for her. Hiram muttered something about waiting outside and sat down on a bench in the grass-grown yard. He had finished filling his pipe, and was fumbling in his pocket for a match.

"I feel like cryin' on your account, Mrs. Tinsley," the wife of the jailer said, as she opened the door. She took Mrs. Tinsley's hand and led her into the tiny hallway, and thence into a rather bare-looking sitting-room. "I'm a mother of a growin' boy myself, and can well understand how you feel."

Wordless, her eyes roving over the room, the visitor sank into a rocking-chair which the other pushed forward.

"Of course, I've seen a lots of such trouble since Henry got this job," Mrs. Lapsley went on, "and I reckon if anybody can cheer you up I can. I've taken notice, Mrs. Tinsley, that it never is, somehow, as hard to stand as it seems at first. There's always hope held out as the time passes; and in Howard's case, you know, nothing will be done till the fall term, and a great deal can happen between now and then. You are welcome to come here and set and talk at any hour of the day, and see him, too, I reckon, as often as you like. La me! do you remember old man Bishop—I'm sure you must—who was in fer wife-killin' and was housed here with us for six months before he was finally sent to the chain gang? Henry says it was the old man's age that saved his neck, and, as it is, he has a soft snap as a trusty guarding other prisoners on road work. But I started to say that his sister Sue—an old maid, but all right in other respects—used to fetch her sewin' an' come here as regular as sun-up. We fed 'er, too, at the county's expense, an' no objection was raised. That is, she took dinner often. She is a lively body, full o' fun an' good spirits, and she had me laughin' all the time over some prank or tale she told. Why, me 'n' her got so thick that after her brother was sent off she kept comin' jest the same. She was finally weaned off,

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though. You may have heard about it. They say she fell in love with a disabled hoss-doctor that had a wife alive some'r's, who had acted in a way that was unbecoming of a decent woman, but that may be all talk. Anyway, I don't blame Sue much. She never had a chance at a man in all her life, and if a feller out of a job with one leg shorter than the other an' watery eyes wanted 'er more'n he did a woman he had tried to live with an' couldn't, why—but I see Henry coming. He handles the keys. They don't trust me with 'em. A gang o' niggers in for crap-shooting broke out o' Number 3 last summer in broad daylight an' forced me to unlock a white feller's cell across the passage who had been givin' 'em tobacco out o' pity. I was bad scared an' did all they told me. Henry would 'a' drawed his gun an' give 'em lead instead o' keys; but me bein' jest a helpless woman—here's Henry. He's always accusin' me o' talkin' too much—says it may cost 'im his job in the end ef I ain't more particular. He declared that the judge not long ago cautioned 'im to—"

"Barnett says it's all right, Mrs. Tinsley," Lapsley said, coming in and taking a huge bunch of heavy keys from his hip pocket. "He says you are to pass in an' out as you like. He's busy on the case. He's talking to Abner Daniel now. Barnett is close-mouthed, but he knows what he's about. He won't leave a stone unturned. Come on, if you are ready."

Mrs. Tinsley rose, and he led her out to the stairway in the hall. His wife was following, but he said, rather sharply:

"Stay down here. Remember what I told you. Thar's some tattlin' women out at the side fence waitin' fer you, but you stay away from 'em."

At the head of the stairs was a closed steel door which he unlocked and pushed open, the keys jangling harshly against the metal, the massive hinges creaking. Passing

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on, she found that they were in a smaller hallway which was lighted only by a single window heavily barred and set deep in a thick wall of masonry.

"Your eyes will get used to the darkness in a minute or so," Lapsley said, gently. "The sun shines so bright in our rooms down below that it is awkward up here at first. Now I reckon you can see better. Howard's cage is the middle one on the right. Oh, Howard!" he called out, suddenly. "Here is some one to see you."

Mrs. Tinsley was now facing one side of a cage of steel, the interstices between the bars of which were too small for even a hand to pass through. But by placing her eyes close to one of them she was enabled to look into the cell, which was about ten feet square. The floor of checked steel, like the walls, had no covering. A canvas cot was the only piece of furniture the cell contained. From the narrow window looking out upon the street Howard had noted the approach of his mother, and he was somewhat prepared for her visit.

He came to her smiling. With a pang it flashed upon her that he had made just such a facial feint when he was a child of ten. Hearing him scream out suddenly one day, she had run to the wood-yard and found him pinned to the ground by some heavy logs which had rolled down upon him. Although in great pain from a twisted ankle, he had smiled and laughed reassuringly while she was removing the wood.

"It's all a big mistake," he now said. "I hope you are not worried, mother. It will turn out all right. They always have to start in by accusing *some one*, you know, and I was the first one they thought of."

She wondered if she, too, could assume cheerfulness under the deadening despair which had saturated her whole being. Could she be other than furious when he was so unjustly under the ban of the law that ought to be fair to the innocent? Her rage was like that of a

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tigress bound in view of its suffering young, and yet she controlled it.

"I had to come in, anyway," she said. "Thar was some things that have to be tuck out home. We need sugar an' coffee an' a bag o' salt. Yore pa's hired hands to help with the hayin', an' they have to be fed."

"They will find the guilty man, mother." Howard put the fingers of his right hand into one of the squares and drew his face close to hers. "A thing like that can't be hid long. Craig made a lot of enemies, and it just happened, you see, that he was dealt with at the time he and I quarreled."

"Yes, they'll find 'im," she faltered, oddly encouraged by his calmness, and proud of him as mothers have been proud to see their sons march away to war. "They will find him."

He laughed, looking around the cell. "I'm glad it is summer-time. In the winter this place must be as cold as the very dickens; but you see how nice and cool it is now. It is all poppycock about prisoners suffering so much. They live on the fat of the land in this hotel, I tell you."

CHAPTER XXXIV

HALF an hour later she came down-stairs and passed out of the front door into the yard. She saw Mrs. Lapsley at the gate talking to two women and a little girl. Hearing her step, Mrs. Lapsley turned to her.

"You see, I'm already disobeyin' Henry's orders," she smiled. "The day of slavery for us married women is past, thank the Lord! Them women are friends of mine—in fact, one is a connection on my father's side, a third or fourth cousin. You may have heard of the Coleman family that moved here from Alabama. I hadn't the slightest idea me 'n' her was kin to one another till it came up by accident one day. It was peculiar how that happened—"

"I was lookin' fer my husband," Mrs. Tinsley broke in, glancing toward the bench where she had left Hiram.

"Oh yes, now I remember," Mrs. Lapsley said. "He got tired waiting fer you. Some men was about to make a hoss-swap, and Mr. Tinsley went with 'em to the livery stable to see which got the best of it. He said to tell you he'd meet you at the wagon-yard when you got ready to go out home. Henry has left me in charge again. One of our bloodhounds is sick, and he took it over to a dog-doctor—or a man that *thinks* he's one—in the edge o' town. Henry is afraid somebody has a grudge against 'im and has fed the dog poisoned meat. He rolls and wallows—the dog does—like he had powdered glass inside of 'im, an' thar ain't no cure ever been discovered for that complaint. We don't know jest what to do, and no

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medicine can drive it out. Yes, that woman is a Coleman, and the Coleman family—"

"I'll have to go," Mrs. Tinsley said, absently. "Good day."

"Good day, Mrs. Tinsley," was the reply. "I hope you will keep cheerful. If I wasn't cheerful I'd die outright. What's the use o' pinin', I say? Face trouble as bold as a lion, and it will turn tail an' leave you high and dry. Wait, Cousin Hester," she called out to one of the women, both of whom were starting away. "I want you to come in and see how I cut and basted my skirt. Henry won't be back for an hour. You can take the pattern with you; I won't need it any more."

Passing through the gate, Mrs. Tinsley trudged down the street to the hotel and entered at one of the side doors. Going into the office, she found Sugart at the desk looking over the register.

"How are you, Mrs. Tinsley?" He greeted her in surprise, a blended look of sympathy and embarrassment settling on his face.

She pushed her bonnet farther back and leaned against the desk. "Howard has a room here, I believe," she said.

"Yes, Mrs. Tinsley; one flight up, to the right down the hall."

"I want to sleep thar to-night if you have no objections," she said. "I—I want to be close to Howard and—"

"Oh, it is all right," Sugart declared. "Howard will be glad to have it occupied, I know, and we'll do all we can for your comfort. Do you want to go up now? If you do I'll show you myself."

She nodded. He was on the point of trying to say something comforting, but his usual affability was checked, so he simply led her up to the room.

"Anything I can do for you?" he asked, as he was turning to leave her.

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"If you see my husband please tell him not to wait fer me," she said. "Tell 'im I'm goin' to stay in town fer a while."

"All right, Mrs. Tinsley, I'll tell him. He's on the street, and I'll find him and let him know."

Mrs. Tinsley had a simple supper in her son's room that evening, and when it was quite dark she slipped out into the street. Not many persons were about. It was before the day of gas in Darley, and the street was lighted only by the oil-lamps of the post-office, shops, and stores, the beams of which fell through the front doors and windows upon the sidewalk. She hardly knew whither she was going, but felt that she must get away from her son's room, which had oppressed her beyond expression. Turning into the street that led to the jail, she moved listlessly toward the prison, the roof-line of which she could see above the trees two squares away. The yard of the court-house adjoining the jail was large, well shaded, and grown with grass. No one was there, and she passed through the gate and went in, seeking a point from which she could see the window opposite her son's cell. The rising dew which had gathered on the grass dampened her feet and weighted down the edge of her skirt as she paced restlessly back and forth. A clock in the tower of the court-house began a metallic snarl, and then eight ringing blows of its hammer fell on the huge bell. Another hour passed. The bell rang again. Her wet feet felt chill, and she shuddered. The sky above the jail was clear and full of stars. She heard the gate click, and a moment later a tall figure loomed up close to her. It was Abner Daniel. He nodded, held out his hand, and took her inert one into a warm, firm clasp.

"I met Hiram driving out," Abner began. "He said you was goin' to stay at the hotel awhile. I called thar to see you. They sent up to yore room and said you was

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out. I looked several places fer you, an' finally come here. I've got my buggy ready. I want to take you back home."

She took off her bonnet, and as she twisted it in her hands he saw a grim purpose gleaming in her eyes. "I won't go," she said. "I'm goin' to stay right here on this spot till sunrise. I know what I want, an' I want to do that. My child is up thar in confinement, Abner Daniel, an' I'm his mother—that's enough to say—I'm his mother. You don't know how I feel—not a livin' man or woman on this heartless earth can have the slightest idea of it. Hiram says thar's a hell. I used to want to dispute it. I won't a bit longer—not from this hour forth, fer ef this"—she raised both her hands and beat her breast—"ef this agony kin be put on a woman that cayn't tell wharin she's sinned in all her life, thar must be some'n' as bad set aside fer the wicked. You are a wise man, Abner Daniel, fer our day an' time. The Bible speaks of folks that was advised to cuss God an' die. Tell me how to cuss 'Im—then tell me how to die."

Abner hung fire a moment. He swallowed before speaking, as if his tense emotion had forced its very fluid into his throat.

"You *can't* cuss God, Cynthia Tinsley!" he answered, sharply. "No livin' creatur' kin cuss God. Everything that is, is *of* God an' *from* God, an' ef you could cuss God it would be God cussin' *Hisse'f*."

She put on her bonnet and held out her hands wide apart. Her bonnet slid slowly backward, and was kept from falling only by the strings tied beneath her chin. "All that keeps *me* from cussin' 'Im is that, this night, I hain't sure thar *is* sech a Bein'. I have fought unbelief all my life—sayin' I believed this and that fool statement jest to keep from standin' in the way o' other folks that was seekin' salvation; but to-night I know by my own feelin's that thar is only one ruler that could torture folks

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as me an' mine is bein' tortured, an' that is the devil. Listen to me, Abner Daniel: idle, empty-pated women, here an' thar over this globe—women livin' in ease an' luxury that never lifted a hand to aid a livin' soul—is goin' to bed to-night cuddlin' the'r young to the'r breasts an' cooin' to 'em an' pettin' 'em an' sayin' sweet things. Ef thar is a *good* God he must stand fer some sort o' equality, an' a born idiot after you've bent his skull in with a sledge-hammer ort to know that *my* lot ain't equal to *the's*."

"Hush, hush! You *must* hush!" Abner said, softly, yearningly. "I know what trouble means. I've been through it. You may not know it, but I'm sufferin' now, fer I love yore boy as ef he was my own. But I think I know why trouble was put in the world. It is the only firm thing the human sperit kin put its foot on when it starts to climb up to God, who is high above an' separate an' distinct from all material things. You are makin' gross, short-lived matter of yore boy, while all God sees in 'im is his eternal soul. When I was younger I kicked agin the pricks, but now—"

"Listen to me!" she broke in, with a low, fierce snarl. "Thar might be some sense in a body sufferin' once or twice fer the'r good, but my life has been one long string o' pains after pains. As a gal I was full o' beautiful ideas o' love, but to please my folks I quit thinkin' about a certain one that I liked from the start an' tied up with a man I never cared a hill o' beans fer, because he had a little handful o' property. I bore with his eternal twaddle about religion. Day after day I listened to his talk about how to escape God's stern wrath an' the devil's keen snares. Two children was born to me. One was tuck just after it had sucked life from my breast long enough fer me to be willing to die fer it. One was left. That was Howard. I thanked God fer 'im. He was the only person I ever loved. I was proud of 'im, but I seed 'im persecuted by his father every day o' his young life,

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and now he's held up thar in a public steel box like a guilty nigger with all the world agin 'im. He's my baby still. I want 'im here in my arms, on this burnin' breast. You talk about a lovin' God—go tell it to rocks an' sticks—tell it to dumb cattle chawin' the'r cud's as they lie on the'r bellies in the fields, to pigs in filthy pens—but don't tell it to *me*! If thar is a God he's a pore, puny, jumpin'-jack of a one, not made in *my* image, fer I wouldn't treat an' egg-suckin' dog as I'm bein' treated to-night."

Her chin sank to her breast. Abner saw her shoulders quivering under the storm of passion which was sweeping over her. "Listen to me," he said, huskily. "It is always out of the very blackest cloud that the fust real ray of God's light comes. You think yore load is heavy an' of no use in the great plan, but you don't look deep enough. Thar was a woman, Cynthy Tinsley"—Abner had used the illustration before—"that suffered as much or more than you. Her Son was tortured and crucified. She stood an' looked on, I reckon, till she fell flat on 'er face on the earth an' cried out to God that the awful cup might pass, but it didn't pass, Cynthy. She had to drain it. I reckon that mother at the foot of that stained cross wanted to shirk the ordeal; but look what it has done fer humanity all over the earth! That one thing has been talked about more than any other event an' done more to lift the world than all else. And was she dissatisfied with the outcome? How do you reckon that woman felt when her Son rose an' appeared to her in all that shining light with God's own face on 'Im? Ah, wasn't she repaid, then? And wouldn't you be happier to-night ef you could take that lesson to heart an' look up an' trust some'n' higher 'n wiser 'n yorese'f? What right have we to dispute the vast order of things? Why don't them rollin' worlds up thar bump once in a million years? They are jest material substance, an' sperit is a thousand times higher an' finer. You are bein' tested as Job was tested. Right at this

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minute if you could say, 'Thy will be done,' an' really mean it, as I'm sayin' it, Cynthy, a shower o' something would descend on you that would make you go home an' sleep as sound as a baby in a cradle. Try it; fer God's sake try it. Pray fer strength and patience. Go home an' go about your duties. Don't fret Howard by yore grief. We are goin' to pull him out o' this, an' the lesson will be fer his good. Already he sees how wrong it was fer 'im to give way to his temper like he did when he armed hisse'f and made them threats. Come on, an' git in my buggy."

He paused. She walked away from him and stood for several minutes with her back turned. She seemed not to be breathing. Suddenly she raised her eyes to the jail window, and a low, lingering sob escaped her. Turning suddenly to him, she put out her hands and caught his in a tight clasp.

"Oh, you are a good man—a good man!" she faltered. "Surely God must be good, or you wouldn't be here in human shape talkin' like this. You've made me feel better. I don't know why, but you have."

"'Tain't me, but God who's speakin' through you as an answer to yore fust glance in His direction."

"Yes, I'll go home," she consented. "How strange it is, Abner Daniel, but I feel better—I do, I do."

His buggy was at the gate, and side by side they walked to it.

CHAPTER XXXV

THE next morning, as Abner sat in the office, he had an unexpected visitor. It was Mary Trumbley. She entered hesitatingly, her fine eyes shrinking from his surprised stare.

"Pole Baker was coming in with his wagon, and I came with him," she said, taking the chair Abner was offering with his usual gallantry. "I didn't tell mother what I intended to do, for she would have objected, and there are some things she cannot advise me about. I went to see Howard, Uncle Abner, and I'm glad I did, for it seemed to cheer him up."

"I'm glad you went, too," Abner said. "You don't believe he's guilty no more'n I do, an' he naturally would appreciate sech friendship at a time when thar is so much doubt agin 'im."

"There was one thing I wanted to speak to him about, but somehow I couldn't get to it." Mary sighed. "So—so, I thought I'd mention it to you. You may look on it as very egotistical, but I have enough confidence in myself to want to try it, anyway. Uncle Abner, Howard has talked to me a great deal about his editorial policy, and I think I know as much about his general plan as any one except yourself."

"Yes, I know he confided in you a lot," Abner said, gently. "In fact, he told me several times that you had given him some o' his best ideas. He ain't stuck up over his brains, Howard ain't, an' he always wants to place credit whar credit is due."

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At this Mary's color rose higher. She was silent for a moment, and then she plunged into what she had in mind.

"Uncle Abner," she said, "bail has been refused him, hasn't it?"

"Yes," Abner nodded, reluctantly. "We may as well face that fact an' lay it aside. I hoped fer it awhile, but the judge sent me word last night that it was plumb out o' the question. He sympathizes, but he says he can't avoid the stand he's taken."

"I knew it," Mary said, with averted glance, "and that will mean, Uncle Abner, that Howard will have to be away from the office at least till the fall term of court."

"That's the hardest part of it," Abner said. "That's what seems to hurt Howard above all. I'm a green hand, you know, an' our paper is likely to get in an awful shape. I'm terribly upset. Thinkin' about him an' tryin' to run everything here is too much fer me."

"That's what I came to see you about." Mary now looked her old friend straight in the face. "Uncle Abner, I believe I can do work on the paper that—that Howard will approve of. I don't know why I feel so confident; but I know I can, and, feeling that way, I thought—"

"Good gracious! Fine, fine!" Abner clapped his hands together and continued to rub them in sheer enthusiasm. "You are the best person in the state fer the job. You can do it, an' Howard never would stop thankin' you. I'll git yore ma to consent—that will be easy enough. You may set in at once. Howard won't be plumb idle, either; he'll help with advice, anyway, an' with you here in his place we'll git along fine. I need you awful, fer I'm goin' to work on his case. Somebody's done that deed, an' our only hope is to bring the right man to justice."

"Well, I'll come in with you in the morning," Mary

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said, gratefully. "Now, I'll hurry back home. I'm going to walk out. I need the exercise. Pole Baker is not going back till evening. He is terribly upset over Howard's trouble; he could not talk of anything else as we drove in."

One evening after supper, at the end of that week, Pole Baker left his wife and children seated on the grass in front of his cottage and went down the road toward Trumbley's. He was bent on seeing Abner Daniel, and thought the present was as favorable a time as any. However, just as he came into view of Trumbley's house in the dusk he saw Abner come out at the front gate and start across an old corn-field toward the mountain beyond it. Pole impulsively puckered his lips to whistle, but suddenly changed his mind.

"Maybe I'd better let the old duck alone," he mused. "Fer all I know, he may be out on some private business. He acts like he don't want to meet nobody, or why does he go through all them briers an' over sech rough ground at this time o' night, when the big road is more handy?"

Pole stopped and watched Abner climb over the zig-zag rail fence which separated Trumbley's land from the mountain forest, and then another idea came to him.

"He's worried like I am," Pole surmised. "Maybe he's jest tryin' to git to some quiet place away from folks so he kin think what's best to do fer that pore boy. I'll follow 'im, anyway, an' see what's up. I've got to talk to 'im 'fore mornin'."

Hurriedly crossing the field toward the point at which Abner had disappeared from view, and finally climbing the fence where Abner had shattered a rotten rail in getting over, Pole paused to listen. The air was very still, and he soon heard the cracking of twigs and rolling of stones under Abner's heavy tread. Thus getting the direction he was to go and stopping to listen at intervals,

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Pole followed into the wood and up the slope, which was at every step becoming more rugged and steeper.

"Ef the old cuss is out 'possum-huntin', it's early in the season," Pole said, dryly, "an' he couldn't bag many without a gun or a dog. Ef it was anybody but old Ab I would think he had a notion of makin' somethin' to drink, an' doin' it as quiet as possible to avoid detection. No, it ain't that, fer he's open an' aboveboard, an' he's too badly bothered right now to think o' devilment o' any sort."

On the two went, Abner still leading, Pole following as stealthily as a pioneer tracing a redskin over virgin soil. They were now high above the far-reaching valley. To the east lay the straggling lights of the town; at the mountain's foot, through an open door, shone the fire in the kitchen at Trumbley's. Suddenly Pole heard closer to him than he expected a sound like that of small sticks being broken, and he paused and stood still in wonder. What could it mean? Stick after stick was cracked asunder, as if Abner was bending them across his knee, some of them giving out sharp reports like the bursting of sand-crackers. A moment later a light flared up, and Abner's gaunt form in grim silhouette loomed up against a shelving boulder as he applied a match to a heap of dry leaves and twigs in a smoke-blackened nook in the rocks.

"Well, well, well!" Pole said to himself. "Ef old Ab is runnin' a moonshine-still or a secret counterfeitin'-plant I may as well hook on to 'im. Law-breakin' is all right an' safe ef he's doin' it."

Undecided as to what to do, Pole stood stock still, though his feet were rather insecurely grounded on a spot that seemed to be slowly yielding under his weight. He saw Abner adding sticks and leaves and pieces of bark to his fire, which was now burning brightly. Abner stepped back among the bushes suddenly, and Pole saw him bend

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to the ground and catch hold of a dark object and begin to drag it into the light.

"My Lord, what *is* the matter with 'im?" Pole asked the question of himself in great perplexity, and in leaning forward to see better he dislodged a stone which began to roll noisily down the steep. Faster and faster it went, bounding and striking the trunks of trees till it finally stopped. Pole held his breath in dismay. He saw Abner draw himself up erectly and stand staring fixedly in his direction. For a moment the two pairs of eyes glared toward each other. Then Abner broke the silence.

"Who goes thar?" he called out, as a sentinel might who was doing duty with a sleeping army in his care.

"A friend!" Pole bethought himself to say, as appropriate to his sense of intrusion and desire toward conciliation. "Pole Baker."

The pause after such an announcement struck Baker as being proof that Abner did not relish the meeting, and with growing awkwardness he went on:

"I didn't mean to be nosin' about in yore private business, Uncle Ab, but I went to see you at home jest as you was leavin'. You was right ahead o' me. I folloed, expectin' you to turn back ever' minute, till I got away up here, an'—well, here I am."

"Humph!" Abner broke in, and then Pole saw him bend down, grasp the object he had been dragging, and continue pulling it toward the fire. Moving forward, Pole saw that it was a log of wood, a piece of the trunk of a decayed pine about ten feet long.

"Do you want any help?" he asked, smiling in spite of the gravity of the situation.

"No, I kin put it on," Abner answered, shortly; "but I'll tell you what you kin do. You kin go whar I got this un an' fetch some o' them fat pine-knots lyin' thar to start it to goin'."

"I want to git onto the game fust, Uncle Ab," Pole

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laughed, in a low, mystified chuckle. "I make it a rule to know what I'm a-doin' in little things as well as big. The only time I depart from my rule is when I'm drunk, an' then I am often sorry about it, as you may know."

Abner was actually blushing now, and his friend could not remember ever having seen the phenomenon before. To hide his confusion Abner went back into the shadows and brought forward some of the pine-knots of which he had spoken and laid them upon the flames. Over them he put the log, carefully placing a stone under one end to secure ventilation.

"I may as well own up an' be done with it," he finally said, letting his sheepish glance fall into Pole's resolute stare. "Ef I had evil in mind, settin' the woods afire or the like, it would be easier to explain. I reckon most of us has secret crochets that the world don't know about, an' you've got onto one o' mine."

"I don't know as I'm on yit," Pole said, gravely. "An', Uncle Ab, I'll tell you that, so fur in the game, I'm as blind as a bat in broad sunlight. Ef you want to call it off right here I'll promise on my life never to let it go out o' my mouth that I've seed what I have."

"Oh, it ain't as bad as that!" Abner said, testily. "Fer you to go away right now—after—after seein' me here like this you'd think it was some'n' awful; but it ain't—it really ain't nothin' but a dang whimsy notion o' mine. I'm considered even-balanced in the head, I reckon, but I know folks well enough to know that they would say I was goin' daft ef they got onto this fool thing. I'm goin' to tell you about it, an' you kin think what you like; you kin tell it, too, ef you see fit. I don't care. I don't owe nobody a cent."

"I won't tell nothin'," Pole returned, more gravely than ever. "I know when to keep my mouth shet."

"You keep makin' so durn much out of it!" Abner sat down on a flat stone by the fire, which looked as if

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it had been used for a seat many times, and folded his long hands over his knees. "This is all thar is to it, Pole. I reckon I begun it about five year ago. I was feelin' sorter bad one cloudy day in the fall, an' I started out fer a walk up this mountain. The furder I went the better I felt, till finally I got to this place júst as a brisk shower of rain set in. Ef you'll look good you'll see that the rock thar shelves back an' makes a sort o' roof. Well, to keep from bein' drenched to the skin I got back in thar an' set down. The rain kept on gittin' harder an' harder, till I felt chilly, an' then, happenin' to have some matches in my pocket an' seein' some dry stuff, leaves an' bark an' one thing or other, I made me a fire. Well, I don't know what it meant, but when that place was all lit up with a red glow, an' the steam was belchin' out o' my clothes an' shoes, an' all that tumult o' rain an' wind was surgin' outside, I had the most restful feelin' I ever had. I'd look out an' see the tree-tops wavin' back an' forth, an' the gray mist hustlin' along over the valley, an' hear the patter on the beds o' leaves an' pine-needles outside, an' turn back to my hole in the rocks with a feelin' I never knowed a person could have. I come from pioneer stock, an' I now believe the love o' simple outdoor life is in my very bones. Well, do you know? After that day whenever I'd git bothered over any matter or the weather was bad I'd slink off here, an' each time I liked it better an' better. I knowed common folks would swear I was off my base, an' so I never let anybody know I did it. See that flat rock agin the big oak? I'll say 'Open See-same,' in a minute, an' let you see what it hides. Under it is a hole I dug about two by two foot, an' it is full o' pans, pots, a knife an' fork, a spoon, a cup an' saucer, an', in fact, a camper's complete outfit, even to a hatchet fer choppin' up kindlin', a rope fer draggin' logs, an' what not. I've lied to Mrs. Trumbley many an' many a time an' said I was to eat over at yore house or

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stay in town, when I've bought me a slice o' bacon, some crackers, fresh eggs, a young chicken, coffee an' sugar, an' climbed up here an' spent the day like Dan'l Boone or Davy Crockett. Them's been the happiest times I ever spent, silly as it may look. The habit would grow on me, I know, ef I let myself loose. Folks laugh at hermits an' say they are cracked; but all of 'em ain't by a long shot. Some of 'em are jest livin' nigher to God, an' have the peace that passeth understandin'. In fact, I believe the more o' God you git in you the less you care fer socks, neckties, or want to shave or cut yore hair."

"I don't know as the argument will hold good," Pole said, with a touch of his irrepressible humor, "fer gittin' soaked with whisky has the same effect. An' ef the Lord instigates a prolonged spree He must leave you to the devil's care when you are comin' out of it."

"Well, it ain't no jokin' matter." Abner spoke as if he wanted to ascertain how far his explanation had met with approval. "I've been doin' this, an' in my judgment it is my own affair. Ef I like to be out under God's sky at certain stated times more 'n I want to stay under a roof—well, that's jest the way I happen to feel about it."

"It won't go one bit further," Pole answered. "You needn't apologize, nuther. You never yit did a thing, Uncle Ab, that was wrong in my eyes, an' it would be a late day fer you to begin now."

"I really hain't been here much lately." Abner's glance rested on the leaping flames. "In fact, not since I tuck hold o' that paper; but, to tell you the truth, I'm so bothered—so broke up over Howard's trouble that I jest had to git off to myse'f. I'm sorry fer his ma; I'm sorry fer Mary; I'm sorry fer *him*. So to-night I jest thought that ef I come up here to my old nest maybe some way would open out fer me to help him."

"That's what I was lookin' fer you about," Pole said, eagerly. "I hain't been in to see you because I was at

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the end o' my rope, an' hated to admit it. I've been told that I'd make a purty good detective, an' I've always thought I *did* have a sort o' turn that way. So when I settled it in my mind that Howard was innocent I 'lowed I'd only have to look about a little to locate the right party, but the more I looked the further I was from any kind o' conclusion."

"My case exactly—p'int-blank!" Abner chimed in, disconsolately. "An' I never was so much put out in my life over anything."

"I've been to see Howard twice," Pole went on. "I didn't let on to him what I was hopin' to do, fer I didn't want 'im to expect things that couldn't happen. Uncle Ab, I never was so sorry fer a human bein' in all my born days. Folks may say it is jest as fair to imprison one accused person as another, but it ain't so; circumstances make the man, an', considerin' all that Howard has been in the community an' what's expected of 'im, his sufferin' is a million times wuss than mine 'u'd be under the same charge. You've seed me chained to a rock-pile workin' out a fine fer bein' drunk, amongst nigger prisoners. I stood it because I deserved it, but the wild, hopeless stare in that boy's eyes would melt a heart o' stone. He had about give up when I seed 'im the last time. He kept talkin' about cases he'd read whar innocent men had been hung or spent the'r lives in jail an' the truth was never known till they was buried an' some dyin' feller confessed."

"Yes, he's mighty nigh give up," Abner sighed. "Billy Barnett, who is by long odds the best lawyer in north Georgia, is workin' like a wheel-hoss, but even he can't hold out much hope. He keeps sayin' we must find the man; but what's the use? You know, an' I know, Pole, that no bloody murderer is goin' to give hisse'f up to the scaffold when all he's got to do is to lie low an' let another feller suffer in his place. I know you are a good un to ferret out things, an' I've been countin' on you."

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"I've been tryin'," Pole answered. "The fust thing I did was to cross my heart and take a solemn oath that not one drop o' liquor 'u'd pass my lips till some'n' was done for Howard that was wuth while. I followed a blind trail. Craig—between me 'n' you—was hated by two or three young women, an' at fust I 'lowed that maybe one o' them or the'r kin had done the job, but I searched 'em all out, looked 'em in the face, an' knowed I was on the wrong scent."

"Then you throwed it up." Abner's tone was almost one of open rebuke. "You throwed it up!"

"No, I didn't—that is, not entirely," Pole said, leveling his stare anew on Abner's dejected face. "At least I wanted to see you an' talk over a fresh line. Say, Uncle Ab, it is a ticklish sort o' job when you hain't got nothin' to go by but what you might call suspicion, an' then not be sure that you ain't thinkin' a thing may be so because you are so anxious to carry yore point. Now, the matter is like this, an' I want you to think hard on it, fer I'm all balled up an' hardly know what I believe an' what I don't believe. Now, in the fust place, it is impossible to even start on a hunt like this unless you have some *little* thing or some particular person to aim at. Now, I've got this much to start on, an' it is all I *have* got. The Lord knows it is small enough when you realize that you may be suspectin' an innocent man an' one without a dollar to defend hisse'f with. You remember the day Howard an' Craig met in town an' had that row? Well, that mornin', just as Craig was startin' off to town, I happened to be in Trumbley's piece o' woodland on the slope overlookin' Craig's farm. I was up thar to see about some trees I'd agreed to cut down and stack up in cords fer Trumbley's winter supply. Well, I seed Craig leave his hoss at the barn an' walk across his field to whar Abe Fulton was makin' a wire fence fer 'im. The truth is, I tuck no particular notice of 'em, an' the dis-

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tance was so great that I couldn't see the'r faces good nor hear what was said; but somehow it struck me at the time that they was havin' words. Whether it was their motions, or looks, or what not, I don't know; but, anyways, I remember that the fust thought that popped into my head after Craig's mix-up with Howard was that Craig had quarreled with Abe, an' that was one reason he was so ready to pounce on somebody else. But I didn't let the thing weigh much with me at the time, fer, you see, I was followin' the other scent; but after that failed I tuck up the other an' tried to see ef I could connect Abe with the killin'."

"An' did you—*did* you, that's the question?" Abner's lower lip was quivering under tense suspense; his bushy brows had met.

"I don't know, Uncle Ab; as God is my final judge, I don't," Pole returned, "an' that's why I've come to you. All I could do was this: I went by Craig's field an' seed that the fence wasn't finished, but I couldn't say that meant anything, fer Craig was slow pay, an' no sensible person would keep on workin' fer a dead man without knowin' who was his boss, anyway."

"No, of course not," Abner agreed. "Was that all?"

"No, not quite; I next set out to look fer Abe. I seed 'im in a bunch o' loafers at the Cotton Compress, whar jobs by the hour was give out fer truckin' an' loadin' an' the like. I knowed most of 'em. So I got in the gang an' swapped yarns an' jokes with 'em. All the time Abe set on a bale o' cotton whittlin' a stick an' sayin' nothin'. I noticed that he wouldn't laugh much along with the balance, but when I came to think of it I couldn't remember ever seein' the cuss smile or pass a joke nohow, an' so, you see, I couldn't go by that. I studied 'im a good hour. I got the crowd to talk about the murder once, an' I watched Abe, but I couldn't notice that he acted anyways different from the rest. He jest set with his

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feet crossed an' the brim o' his old hat over his eyes an' trimmed straight out in front of 'im."

"I see, I see," Abner nodded, thoughtfully. "So you throwed that scent up, too?"

"No, I didn't, Uncle Ab—that is, not entirely. I set about in a sly, underhand way amongst folks that had knowed Abe a long time, to see ef he'd ever been in any difficulties. Everywhar he was spoke of as bein' a chap that wouldn't fly off the handle easy. In fact, most folks 'lowed that Abe would take a lot before he'd git mad. Now, here comes the only p'int I've found worth considerin', an' I want yore opinion. Ten years ago, when Abe lived over the mountain, he was arrested an' tried fer assault on a feller an' put in jail fer a year. The feller who he mighty nigh killed owned a little sawmill whar Abe was workin', an' one day at log-rollin' the sawmill man got mad at Abe fer some blunder or other an' kicked 'im like a dog in the presence o' all the rest. Now, watch close, Uncle Ab. Witnesses said on oath at the trial that Abe tuck his kickin' without a word. He rolled logs on the rest o' the day an' drawed his pay; but that night evidence showed that he waylaid the sawmill man, beat 'im over the head with a hickory club, an' left 'im unconscious in the road. Now, thar you are, Uncle Ab. You know as much about that line of investigation as I do. Does it amount to anything or not? We know *our* man ain't the one; is it likely that Abe is?"

Abner's eyes were glowing with interest. He put his hand into his pocket and got out a piece of tobacco which he bit into and then twisted.

"It is some'n', anyway," he answered. "What are you goin' to do next?"

"Not a blessed thing," Pole said, flatly.

"You say you ain't?" Abner lifted his brows in surprise; his crunching jaws came to a pause and hung in suspense.

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"No, an' I'll tell you why, Uncle Ab. I'm sort o' good at a big, bold, quick-shot sort o' bluff. I think—in a push—that I could hold a corn-cob pipe in a feller's face ef it was a little dark an' make 'im think his last hour had come, but I couldn't wheedle a chap along as I've seed you do with yore lazy, offhand chat. No, sir; what I've done, ef I've done anything, is at yore service; but I can't use it myse'f. I'm at the end o' my rope, an I'm danglin' with my feet off the ground, at that."

Without a word Abner got up, stretched himself, and yawned.

"I'll tell you what I'm goin' to do," he said, evasively. "Thar's a little spring out thar a piece. I'm goin' to git my bucket out o' my rock pantry an' fetch some water. Then I'm goin' to make me 'n' you some o' the best coffee you ever tasted. I've got some stuff in thar to eat, too, an' you've got to jine me. After that we kin set here an' smoke an' chaw an' plan till midnight. We may be on the right track, an' we may not. Who knows?"

CHAPTER XXXVI

ONE sultry evening at dusk, as Abner sat talking to Mary about Howard in the front yard, Abe Fulton trudged along past the gate, a small bag of flour on his shoulder. He did not look toward them, but kept his eyes on the dusty road. Seeing that Mary was looking at the man, Abner remarked, casually:

"That feller looks like he is purty hard up. He had a regular job workin' fer Craig, but that's all off now, of course."

"I'm sorry for his wife," Mary said, listlessly. "I don't believe the poor creature gets enough to eat half the time, and as for clothes, she is a pitiful sight. I've heard that she is constantly complaining."

At this instant Mrs. Trumbley called Mary into the house, and Abner was left alone. Going to the gate, he looked after the disappearing figure he had just noted, then he glanced back into the house. "Might as well now as later," he mused. "Time is valuable, an' after all Pole may be away off the track. Twenty men could 'a' done the thing as well as this un."

Taking a cautious look into the house, Abner slipped around the corner and went down the path to the stable. Opening the door of a stall containing his favorite horse, he took the animal by the forelock and led it across the lot to a gate which he opened. Then, raising his hands threateningly, he drove the horse through, watching it as it galloped off into the woods. Then, going to a wagon-shed near by, Abner took a bridle from a row of saddles and

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halts, and with it on his arm he passed through the gate and started down the road, the leather reins dragging in the dust at his side. Half a mile farther on he turned aside into the wood and walked through the twilight till he saw a gleam of fire through the trees, and knew it was from the cabin occupied by Abe Fulton and his wife. Here Abner began to walk more slowly, and as he moved toward the light he whistled loudly after the manner of farmers calling their horses. Presently he emerged from the low, scattering bushes immediately in front of the cabin. Mrs. Fulton came to the door, her hands white with some dough she was mixing.

"Lost yo' hoss, Mr. Daniel?" she asked, as she recognized him and noticed the bridle in his hand.

"Yes; have you seed 'im?" Abner came closer. "He's the very devil to slip a halter when he's hitched to a post. He l'arnt the trick somehow, an' I hain't never broke 'im of it."

"No, I hain't noticed a loose hoss o' any sort," the woman answered. "Maybe Abe has; he's jest come from town. Say, Abe"—she turned to look into the cabin—"have you seed anything o' Mr. Daniel's hoss?"

There was no immediate answer, but a crunching tread came from within, and Abe slouched forward into the doorway. Abner remarked a certain restless stare in the man's eyes, and fancied that he saw a hunted look of despair in the almost brutal face.

"No, I hain't seen no hoss," Abe said. "Was it yore young bay?"

"Yes, that un with the blazed face, an' white stockin' on the left hind foot. It is a sorter serious thing, Abe, when stock wander off in the mountains at this time o' year. They git plenty o' grass an' water, an' don't care ef they never come back. A sneakin' gipsy once took a fine mule o' mine that was wanderin' about an' swapped

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it fer a stallion. The mule had my brand on its flank, though, an' I got it back."

"No, I hain't seed 'im." Abe stepped down on the ground. He looked like an animal with his unshaven face; beetling brows, eyes set close together, and burly neck, down which his unkempt hair hung in matted strands.

"Excuse me; I smell my bacon a-burnin'," Mrs. Fulton exclaimed, suddenly. "Abe, give Mr. Daniel a chair. I'll bet he's tired."

"Ef I ain't nobody ever was," Abner smiled, dropping his bridle at his feet. "It ain't no small job trampin' over rocks an' stumps an' through swamps after a hard day's work on a newspaper."

Abe went into the cabin and brought out a crude, split-bottomed chair, and when Abner had taken it and was mopping his dry brow with his handkerchief Abe sat down on a wash-bench near by and took up a battling-stick and swung it idly to and fro in his hands. From the inside came the sound of frying meat and the aroma of coffee. Abner had paused, but Abe said nothing to keep the conversation going. But that had no significance, for Fulton was a non-communicative person.

"Yes, I think it is the indoor work that does me up, Abe," Abner went on, glibly. "A feller that's lived on a farm all his life makes a poor out at a job like my new one. I acted the plumb fool when I put good money in that plant; but you know, of course, that I was countin' on Howard Tinsley to run it fer me, but, la me! considerin' the plight the boy's got hisse'f in, that's all off, an' I've got the bag to hold—green as I am. You fellers that do odd jobs here an' thar may think yore lot's hard, but you are more lucky than you imagine. The Lord knows I wish I had as little to bother about as you have, Abe."

The man tapped the toe of his ragged shoe with the battling-stick. He laid it down on the bench beside him,

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only to take it up again. It was as if he thought some sort of response was expected of him. He swallowed, glanced furtively at Abner, and cleared his throat. Presently, with a wavering glance on the firelight in the cabin, he jerked out:

"He'll come out all right—they won't keep 'im in long."

"Humph! I say," Abner sniffed, "what makes you think that, Abe?"

There was a moment's hesitation, then Abe answered:

"Oh, because fellers like that always come clear. Howard's got influential kin, an' he stands at the top. The courts are a sort o' joke, an' so is the general run o' juries. A feller jest has to have a little pull in politics, a few dollars behind 'im, an' wear good clothes to git out o' anything. Oh, don't you bother, Howard won't be kept in long."

"I wish you was right; I really do." Abner reached out carelessly and picked up his bridle and began to test the strength of the reins as he drew them across his knee. "I see now I've got to rub this leather with some sort o' oil: it is crackin'. Everything I've got on my farm is goin' to rack an' ruin. Yes, I wish you was right about Howard, Abe, fer ef I don't git help from him I'll certainly run aground. I ain't made out o' money, Abe, an' the whole thing has dropped me in the deepest hole I ever was in."

"You needn't bother," Abe repeated, his glance still averted. "He'll git out and help you with the paper."

"You ain't as old as I am by a long sight, Abe." Abner's tone had never been so confidential and friendly. "You ain't seed as much o' lawin'. Billy Barnett, as you may know, is as keen a practitioner as the state has got. I've retained him, an' he's workin' with might an' main on the case; but him nor me nor all the law in the world can't do a thing as long as Howard holds out as he is doin'."

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"Holds out?" For the first time the glance of the small eyes sought Abner's inquiringly. "What do you mean by holdin' out?"

Abner seemed to hesitate, and when he finally spoke it was as if he had decided that he might fall deeper into confidence with a man whom he trusted.

"Why, Abe, just between you an' me, I'm afraid that the boy's bull-headed stubbornness is goin' to block all our efforts in his behalf. You know the law well enough—all of us know the law well enough to know that the courts are lenient when a man comes right out an' admits that he done a wrong thing. I'm talkin' to you now as a friend an' a neighbor. In fact, I've heard Howard say lots o' nice things about you an' yore wife, an' I know you are interested in his welfare, an' will hate to hear how he is actin'. But the truth is—the sad truth is—that he won't listen to reason. Talk as we will, the boy sticks to his plan o' claimin' that he knows nothin' at all about the shootin'."

"Well, maybe he don't!" burst impulsively from the man on the bench. "A feller ain't guilty till he's *proved* guilty."

Abner's eyes gleamed with a new light as he focused them on the heavy features, which seemed strangely to have softened.

"I'm glad to hear you stand up fer 'im, anyway, Abe," Abner went on, suavely; "but, nevertheless, I wouldn't like fer you to talk to him on that line. Thar's too much evidence agin 'im, Abe. I hate to say it, in the face o' his statement, but thar is. Ef he is innocent he's tied tighter by convincin' circumstances than any man that was ever apprehended under sech a charge. You may not have thought much about it, Abe?"

"Yes, I have—that is, I've heard folks talk. I know all they are a-sayin'. I—I don't blame Howard. He—he'd be a fool to say he done it unless—unless he done it,

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no matter what you an' Barnett advise. Life's too short. Huh! ef Howard claims he didn't do it, maybe he *didn't*. He's always treated *me* fair—the boy lent me some money once when I was in a tight an' I couldn't git it from anybody else."

"Oh yes, Howard has a big heart in 'im, an' this is killin' 'im. You only have to think about it, Abe, to see how humiliated he must be. He was jest gittin' a firm foothold in this new line. The papers all over the state was talkin' about him an' his work. Darley is right now gittin' on a boom which Howard set afoot. A new railroad is comin', a site has been selected an' bought in the edge o' town fer a cotton-mill with thousands of spindles that will give employment to mountain folks fer miles around. But right in the middle of it the silly boy lets his hot temper git the best of 'im. He has a few words with a feller that nobody liked an' then waylays 'im an' shoots 'im dead in his tracks, an' of course—well, he'll have to take his medicine, that's all."

"I don't believe Howard *done* it!" Fulton blurted out, his lower lip hanging loosely, the saliva trickling down his chin to his soiled shirt. "I don't believe he done it, because—because you say he says he didn't."

"What you believe don't settle the matter," Abner said, as if contemptuous of an opinion which seemed so ill-grounded. "Howard can't prove nothin' at all to offset the evidence pilin' up mountain-high agin 'im. Lawyers, judges, an' experts generally are laughin' at his stupidity in holdin' out like he is doin'. You ain't entirely alone in yore opinion, Abe; thar's his mammy. You'd hardly expect that broken-hearted woman to doubt the word of her only child, an' I wouldn't talk as free with her as I have to you. Ef she sees fit to believe Howard's cock-an'-bull yarn about sleepin' on that mountain an' all the rest he made up—well, that's jest her right. Then thar is another one that won't listen to reason, nuther,

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an' that is Mary Trumbley. I don't know fer sure, but I imagine ef this calamity hadn't fallen them two would 'a' hit it off together. La, Abe, that's pitiful! She gits as mad as a wet hen at the bare mention o' Howard doin' the thing. She's workin' in his place in the office harder 'n ever a woman worked with the saddest, most desperate, an' yit plucky look on her you ever saw. Every mornin' she goes the fust thing to the jail to take orders from Howard, an' sometimes jots down stuff that he dictates. I seed 'er wipin' 'er eyes t'other day as she come away. She is a religious gal, an' she says God is goin' to answer her prayer that the right one will soften an' come forward an' do the just thing. I think sometimes ef she'd jest jine me 'n' Billy in advisin' Howard to tell the whole truth that he might be influenced to own up before it is too late."

"He'd be a fool to do it," Abe muttered, almost fiercely. "Ef he says he didn't, he didn't."

"Well, have it yore way," Abner sighed. "It shows you have got a good heart. I see you are a true friend to 'im. After all, Abe, Craig *was* an overbearin' man, wasn't he? You done some work fer 'im now an' then, an' ort to know as to that. I remember seein' you about his place. Ef he was as bad as folks say you'd know it, I reckon?"

"He was a devil on human legs!" Abe's eyes were flaring indignantly. "He deceived several young gals that I knowed; one was a fust cousin o' mine, a pore orphan with nobody to take her part. He got 'er love some way, an' after he'd left 'er high an' dry fer another gal she used to hang around the woods tryin' to see the skunk. She broke down an' told me all about it—oh, I knowed 'im!"

Abner's eyes glowed from a fire which he seemed to be trying to extinguish.

"Ah, that must have been Susy Thomas!" he said. "I remember her. She had a sad, sweet face. I didn't

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know she was any kin o' yore'n, though, Abe; it must 'a' been on yore mammy's side?"

"She was the youngest one o' the children my mother's sister Molly left when she died," Abe answered. "How Craig managed to fool 'er as he did I don't know. He was old enough to be her daddy, an' as quarrelsome as a bear. Oh, I know a lots more that I could tell you, but I jest can't."

"I think I kin guess." Abner's tone was sympathetic and persuasive. "He sent 'er off som'er's to a quack doctor—that is, I reckon that may be what you mean, Abe. I remember seein' 'er looking awful peaked an' sad on the street in town once."

"Yes, he did that very thing," Abe said, angrily. "She told me all about it, so she did. She seemed to trust me—seemed to look on me more like a brother than jest a cousin. I reckon that was because I used to git mad at the way she was treated."

"She certainly was to be pitied." Abner was looking away at the sky in the west, which still held a faint red glow of the passing daylight. "I haven't seen 'er, though, fer several months now."

For a moment Abe was silent. His eyes rested on Abner's clear-cut profile, but he said nothing. Abner waited patiently, then, turning his head, his gaze met that of Fulton.

"No, I hain't seed the gal fer a long time," he said, pointedly.

"You never will ag'in," Abe said, his great breast rising high and falling.

"Oh, is that so?" Abner went on. "Then she's left the country?"

A visible shudder passed through Abe's broad, bent shoulders; he drew the battling-stick into his lap and let it rest across his knees.

"Yes, the Norton family—folks that had been good to

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'er, an' overlooked her misfortune—was movin' out to Texas on a farm. They didn't like to leave 'er so destitute, an' they said they thought maybe a change o' climate would do 'er good, an' in time make 'er forgit Craig."

"Well, I hope it did 'er good, Abe." Abner was taking out his tobacco. He offered the little jagged piece to Fulton, but the latter waved it away with a heavy gesture. Abner twisted off a chew and thrust it into his mouth. "Yes, I hope the change helped her?" he went on, bending a glance of suspense on the grim countenance in the twilight.

There was just a hint of delay in Fulton's response. Then his face darkened and his voice quivered under a flood of passion. "She died," he said. "The medicine—the operation—or whatever it was, killed her. Mrs. Norton wrote me all about it. Susy suffered awful. She was in her right mind up to the very last minute. She sent me a message—said I was the only livin' kin she ever had that had treated her half decent. She sent me her love, an' said some'n' 'bout God or Jesus, or the like. She was dyin' in great pain, but she could spare the time to think of a lazy roustabout like me."

"That is 'awful sad," Abner said. "How God could let a man like Craig live as long as he did is a wonder to me. I feel better about Howard's case now than I did, Abe, an' I'm glad I run across you. La, ef Susy Thomas had jest 'a' been *his* fust cousin now a jury would clear 'im without leavin' the'r seats. Ef I was on a jury in a case like that I'd git 'em to give three whoopin' cheers fer the accused, an' we'd ride 'im out o' court on our shoulders an' take 'im in triumph from one end o' town to t'other. But pore Howard, he hain't got no claim like that to help *him* out!"

"I don't believe Howard done it," Abe said, a futile stare in his eyes. "You say he claims he didn't, an' that

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ought to settle it with any reasonable, thinkin' person. His word ort to be enough."

"His word ain't worth a hill o' beans in the matter," Abner said, contemptuously. "In fact, he won't be allowed to testify. He kin make a statement, you know, an' the jury kin respect it or not, as it sees fit. But they won't respect Howard's tale on top o' all that has happened. Craig had a bad temper an' tried several times to wipe his feet on the boy. Howard knowed what a bad stripe he was, an' despised 'im an' said so time after time. All that will go agin the boy at the trial, an' he had plenty o' time to deliberate 'fore actin'. I reckon Craig was rough with you, too, Abe—he was with everybody else he dealt with?"

"Huh, me? I was dirt—manure—hog-dung under his lordly feet. I had to take his cussin' an' abuse or starve."

"He was slow pay, too, I've always heard," Abner said. "The storekeepers in town are hit hard, an' wonderin' of the estate will pay out mortgaged as it is up to the hilt. I reckon he owed you some'n' along with the balance?"

"For a month's hard work, more or less," was the answer; "but I'll not put in no claim. I don't want no lawsuit. He's dead, an' that 'll have to settle it."

"I'd git my rights, Abe," Abner said, sympathetically. "You owe it to yore wife. Let's see; when did you see 'im last, Abe?"

"Me? Why?" Abe's eyelashes flickered. "Le'me think. Why, the last time was as he was startin' off to town the day that—" Abe failed to finish, dropping his glance to the ground.

"I know," Abner prompted him, "the day him an' Howard had the fuss on the street."

"Yes, that was the time," Fulton answered, unsuspectingly. "He was hossback, an' — an' drinkin', as usual."

"I see he rid by here."

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Abe cast a vacant look at the placid questioner, then he nodded. "Yes, I was at the pen thar feedin' my pig. I reckon it was about eight o'clock or a little after. He—he could hardly set in the saddle. I wasn't surprised when I heard about the fuss."

"It was a little bit out o' his *most direct* way to come by here, wasn't it?" Abner's tone was even and careless. "The bee-line way from his house to town is by Trumbley's, ain't it?"

"I don't know," Abe said, slightly disturbed by the demand. "It may be shorter by Trumbley's. Anyway, Craig was too drunk to know which way he was goin'."

"The administrator will not git much fer his farm in the condition it's in," Abner remarked, casually. "I happened to notice that he started you to buildin' a new wire fence. I reckon you never finished it, not knowin' whar yore wages would come from now that he's dead?"

"I throwed that job up," Abe flashed out, impulsively. "He wouldn't plank down a cent, although I was out o' grub. He come over to whar I was at work that last mornin' an' cussed me black an' blue fer makin' a little mistake. After he rid off I shouldered my tools an' quit."

"I see." Abner spat straight toward the firelight, slowly rose to his feet, his hands in his pockets, the bridle thrown over his shoulder. "An' Craig rid straight off to town an' had his fuss with Howard. His little tiff with you started 'im out fer the day, an' he wanted to git back at somebody?"

"Yes, I heard that evenin' that he'd jumped on Howard." Abe fell into the trap. "Craig didn't care fer man, God, nor devil."

"That time in the field was the very last you seed of 'im alive, I reckon?" Abner remarked, as adroitly as a skilled cross-questioner.

"The very last time," Abe said, unguardedly. "He

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was so drunk he could hardly git on his hoss. He had to climb up on the fence to do it, an' then fairly fell into the saddle."

"But, let's see; didn't I hear you to say, Abe," Abner remarked, now staring steadily, "that the last sight you had of 'im was while you was at that pig-pen thar, an' he rid by goin' to town?"

Fulton's beetling brows met in a frown of perplexity. "Did I say that?" he asked. "That must 'a' been another time. My memory ain't as good as it used to be."

"Mine ain't, nuther." Abner threw his shoulders back and yawned. "Well, I must be goin'. I'll let that dang hoss alone fer to-night, anyway. I ain't a-goin' to tramp through the woods in the dark after 'im. Yore bacon an' coffee smells mighty good, Abe. So long."

CHAPTER XXXVII

DOWN the road, when in sight of Trumbley's barn, Abner saw a man seated on a log close to the fence. In the growing darkness the form was not recognizable. But as he drew near the man stood up and advanced toward him. It was Pole Baker, who was whittling a piece of wood.

"A purty tramp you been havin', Uncle Ab," he began, with a smile. "You went exactly the wrong direction. I seed yore hoss just now back o' my place. He's thar yit nibblin' at a fine patch o' grass. Gi' me yore bridle; I'm spryer 'n you are in the legs, ef I ain't smarter in the head, an' I never yit seed a hoss I couldn't halter. Thar's a fence corner that I kin drive 'im in. I'll meet you at the barn."

Abner gave the bridle to him, and as Pole bore it briskly away he strolled on homeward. Ten minutes later, as Abner stood waiting at the gate of the lot, Pole rode up on the bare back of the horse, his legs swinging to and fro from the animal's flanks. He laughed in a significant way as he slid down to the ground.

"Fer a wild, runaway hoss," he said, "this un was the easiest to catch I ever run across. He come up to me of his own accord, jest the same as to say, 'Ef you an' Uncle Ab are through playin' tag with me I'll go home to bed.' He seemed actually to wink at me, same as to say, 'You know Uncle Ab as well as I do, Pole, an' he's always up to some trick or other.'"

"Humph!" Abner said, his mind evidently far away,

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as he opened the gate and let the horse loose in the lot.

"You kin sniff ef you want to," Pole said, with a meaning smile. "I ain't a-goin' to pry into yore business, though I'll admit I'm losin' sleep over the very thing you are thinkin' about at this minute. Ridin' back jest now it struck me that a feller o' yore wide experience wouldn't meander off on a bare, rocky hillside lookin' fer a hoss that's out after grass when you know mighty well that it grows on low ground. You mought lie an' say you'd already been whar I found the hoss, but that wouldn't pass my Adam's apple, fer I seed from the grass that had been topped in one spot that the hoss had been thar a good while."

"You are gittin' awfully sharp, Pole," Abner said, with a sudden smile. "You said t'other night on the mountain that thar was some delicate things I could work better 'n you. I don't believe it."

"I know whar you've been," Pole said, eagerly. "You've been to see Abe Fulton. You have been, hain't you, old man?"

Abner nodded silently, the worried expression stealing back into his face.

"I knowed it!" Pole cried, triumphantly. "Well, what's yore opinion? Is it likely that Abe done it?"

"I think he did, Pole," Abner answered, slowly. "I am purty sure he done it; but that don't git us out o' the mire by a long shot."

"You say it don't?" Pole's voice sank, and a shadow crossed his face.

"No, it don't," Abner went on. "I've read an' heard o' big cases, Pole, whar sharp detective work was done with plumb success; but in all of 'em thar was outside happenin's, an' facts to pick up an' piece together till the man was tied hand an' foot; but in this case, Pole, the truth lies away down in the heart of a single human

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bein'. In my opinion Abe is the feller that done the deed, but it is jest my private opinion, an' that ain't wuth a straw when it comes as an offset to all the facts agin Howard. I might swear I thought so till I was black in the face, an' everybody would say I was just doin' it to free the boy. The situation is purty bad. As I understand Abe, he's a two-sided feller. He'd want to do right by Howard, but he's jest got original animal enough in 'im to be powerful afeard o' death. When his mind is off o' his own danger he is free-hearted enough; but I don't believe he's got sufficient moral backbone to stick his head into the noose fer a noble principle. Only an educated philosopher or a saint with his eyes on the open gate of Heaven could be counted on to act plumb right in sech a case. He's showed the course he intends to pursue, you see. He likes Howard—says the boy has done 'im favors—but the fact that he's let 'im stay in jail this long in sech great disgrace shows his nature."

"But as the time draws nigh fer trial, Uncle Ab, maybe—" Pole began hopefully, but at the sight of Daniel's slowly rocking head he stopped short.

"He'll be more scared then than now," Abner answered. "All the talk the feller hears about what the law will do fer Howard will only drive 'im funder from an honest stand. Only God Hisse'f or some divinely appointed agent o' God could work the transformation that 'u'd make sech a creature step to the front an' act right. It is awfully ticklish, Pole. I don't dare to say right now who I think the guilty man is to Howard hisse'f, to Billy Barnett even, to Mary Trumbley, or the boy's distracted mammy. It wouldn't do to run the slightest resk with folks as high wrought up as they are. I ain't vain o' my powers in sech matters, but I've made a sort o' start with Abe on a certain line, an' I wouldn't have even you interfere fer worlds. The slightest look or word from you might make 'im close up like a turtle in his shell, while—

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well, I don't think he's afeard o' me so far, an' that's some'n'."

"Oh, I understand!" Pole answered. "I won't so much as look at 'im close as I pass 'im in the road. He knows me 'n' you run together a good deal. No, the thing is in yore hands, an', Uncle Ab, ef I was in Howard's shoes I'd ruther have my case with you than any prize man Pinkerton ever trained to his job. You'll git at the very soul o' that guilty skunk an' twist it out o' his dirty hide."

"Don't call 'im a skunk," Abner said, with feeling. "I'll tell you more about 'im some day. He's shirking back afeard to do the right thing out o' natural bodily cowardice; but one time to-night I could a-ketched hold of 'im in love an' sympathy, fer away down under the outside shell o' the feller I seed a sperit as pure as ef it belonged to an angel at God's throne. I could hear the imprisoned thing flutterin' its wings an' the sob in its voice while Abe was talkin' about—well, about a certain thing that I won't mention yit. Yes, I'll try to run it, Pole. I may fail outright, but I don't see no other chance."

Pole started to make some reply, but, hearing a step on the path leading down from the house, he saw Mary Trumbley coming. When she was near them she put her hand into the pocket of her skirt and took out a roll of currency. "Six new subscriptions!" she cried, triumphantly. "There was a convention of country-school teachers at Springtown to-day. Ellen Waycross was there. She is working hard for us. She took the names and sent the money by mail. She wrote me that all the teachers sympathize with us and want to see us succeed."

"You seed Howard to-day, didn't you?" Pole asked her.

"Yes," she nodded, wistfully. "I go almost every day to talk with him about the paper. He knows better than we do what course to follow; but it takes an extra effort

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on his part just now to get his mind on it, and who ~~can~~ blame him?" Mary's eyes were glowing with rising indignation. "I can hardly believe myself that there is any justice in the universe. Up to this time I was full of faith in the wonderful order and harmony of things, but is this order and harmony? For one little outburst of anger against a notoriously bad man all this has come upon a brave young head. Howard is losing hope. He is growing thinner and paler. Mrs. Lapsley says his food often comes back untouched, though she tries her best to cook tempting things for him. Are we in a civilized, God-ruled world, I want to know? Somebody unknown committed a crime, and half a dozen innocent, well-meaning persons are suffering over it. Who can imagine his mother's feelings? Why, he's still her baby, and nobody but a mother—" Mary's voice failed, and her eyes filled with tears.

Both Abner and Pole were moved. Pole lashed the leg of his coarse trousers with the hickory switch he held in his hand, and they heard him mutter an oath, as if in anger over his unexpected weakness.

"We ain't dead yit—thank God, we ain't dead yit!" he gulped. "Howard won't stay thar long. Do you hear me? I know a gang o' mountain boys that was ready to handle that dead skunk fer some o' his acts two years ago. Ef this dang thing keeps up a white string of 'em a mile long will file into Darley some night an' bust that jail to flinders. Most of 'em think Howard done it, but they don't blame 'im, an' they won't see 'im suffer, nuther."

"Shucks!" Abner said, reprovingly. "We've had enough o' law-breakin'. We've got to keep our temper cool an' put this thing through as God would have us do it, in peace an' respect fer law an' order."

"Well, you kin call it *law an' order*," Pole blustered. "I call it law an' pig-tracks. Jest to-day I seed the

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deestric attorney laughin' an' jokin' with the judge an' a passle o' jack-leg lawyers in the court-house yard. They was tellin' funny tales, with cigars in the'r jaws, an' imitat-in' uneducated witnesses on the stan', while that pore friend o' mine was up thar lookin' out o' that window thinkin' his sole hope laid with them. No, sir, you let the worst come an' I'll muster the White Cap gang an' lead 'em to victory ef I swing fer it. I know 'em, by gum! I know 'em! They are as thick in these mountains as fleas in an old dog-house. The only difference betwixt me'n' them is that they all belong to the church an' I don't. On one raid we made agin a Mormon elder that was persuadin' daughters an' young wives, over at Sand Hill, to leave the'r homes an' husbands so that Utah Solomons might add 'em to the'r string o' concubines—on that raid, in which we sent the Mormon elder on his way lookin' like a buzzard without wings, thar was a young preacher who was right then conductin' a rousin' soul-savin' revival. Talk about cussin'! I've done some in my day an' time, but that parson took the rag off the bush. You could 'a' heard 'im a mile. He took the paint-bresh in his own hand an' kept yellin' out that the tar was too cold."

Abner smiled faintly at this, but Mary's face did not light up. "I've not lost faith in God," she said, sincerely. "I am praying to Him constantly. It is the only hope I have."

With these words she turned away, leaving Pole and Abner face to face in the thickening shadows.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

AFTER Abner left him Abe Fulton remained seated on the wash-bench, the battling-stick in his inert hand, his head dejectedly lowered. Presently his wife appeared in the doorway.

"Supper was ready some time ago," she announced; "but I didn't want to call you while Mr. Daniel was here. We hain't got nothin' fit to offer 'im, nor no plates or decent cups an' saucers. I wish you'd buy some, Abe. You have no idea how 'shamed a woman feels in a pinch like this. You remember the day it rained an' Mrs. Triggs couldn't go home? I felt awful that day, fer her safe is full o' table things, even napkins to wipe on an' tie 'round the neck."

Abe rose mechanically, putting the stick down, and listlessly stretching, as if his stooped posture had stiffened his limbs. A deep breath not unlike a sigh came from him. Bending his head at the low doorway, he entered the cabin. He dropped his hat on the bed and sat down at the clothless table, watching his wife with a bland, all but pathetic stare as she bent over the hearth to dish up the food from the pots and pans.

"I overheard part o' what Mr. Daniel was sayin' about Howard Tinsley," Mrs. Fulton said, as she sat down and filled his plate with the young corn and cabbage, which was boiled with pork and gave forth an appetizing smell. "He's sensible—a sight more so than the boy's mammy, who still claims he never done it. You can't fool a man like Abner Daniel. He knows thar ain't no use contend-

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in' agin plain facts, an' he knows that the shortest way out o' the trouble is to tell the truth. Folks love to see a man brave enough to tell the truth in sech a case, an' the court would deal lighter with Howard ef he'd listen to advice like Mr. Daniel could give."

"Nobody knows all about it." Abe let his full fork rest on his plate. "Nobody but—but the one most concerned could know it all. I'm—I'm sorry fer Howard Tinsley, myself, so I am. I—I never thought so much about it till I listened to Abner Daniel to-night. I'm sorry—downright sorry fer the boy."

"Well he ortn't to be bull-headed an' hold back from sensible advice," the woman answered. "I've jest been thinkin', Abe. I'll bet I know why Howard is so awfully afeard o' hangin'."

"You say you do?" Abe's fork still rested on the plate. He had clutched it with his hardened hand, but his fingers relaxed and lay squirming like worms in his lap as he furtively eyed the unobservant woman.

"Yes, I'm sorter keen when it comes to noticin' little mites o' things that folks do or say. I remember 'em an' put 'em together, sometimes a long time afterward. While you an' Mr. Daniel was talkin' out thar I remembered some'n' about Howard that I'll bet few folks would 'a' noticed at the time."

"What was that?" Abe managed to ask, as he put a forkful of food into his twitching mouth and gulped it down.

"Why, you remember when Cal' Parsons was hung last summer over at Springtown fer killin' his wife? You wasn't here then, you know, an', as all the neighbors was goin', an' Mrs. Billingsley axed me to take a seat in the'r spring-wagon, I didn't want to be left. Thar never was sech excitement in these mountains. Wagons an' buggies, an' folks afoot an' on hossback was so thick on the road that it looked like a long snake a-crawlin' through

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dust so heavy that it filled our noses an' tasted gritty betwixt our teeth. When we got to the spot, close to town, we found that the scaffold was put up in a hollow-like place in the pines, whar the land sloped up on every side like a big bowl, an' everybody got close to it. Some said thar was five thousand on hand. The big crowd had been laughin' an' jokin' an' havin' pranks an' fun up to that time; but the sight o' them tall beams an' that rope a-danglin' thar in the sunlight sent a shiver through every one that looked at it. You could hear hardly a word spoke. People was white an' sick-lookin' that never looked that way before. As fer me, I felt like some'n' was bearin' down an' tearin' my very insides out. Some weak women couldn't stand it an' left, but others tuck the'r places. It was awful—awful. I was sorry afterward that I stayed."

"What the hell do you mean by—?" Abe suddenly exclaimed, then guardedly checked himself. There was a greenish tint to his skin, an' his great jaws had relaxed. His flabby cheeks shook as from palsy. But these things were not remarked by the woman, for the coffee on the coals had begun to boil over, and she sprang up to remove it from the fire.

"Thank goodness I got to it in time," she said, wiping the spout of the tin pot on her dingy apron. "You'd 'a' raised a fuss ef it had all run out in the ashes. Whar was I at? Oh yes—"

"What has—has Howard Tinsley got to do with—with *that* hangin'?" Abe faltered. "You take all day to tell a thing that anybody else would finish in a minute."

"I was comin' to that part as fast as I could." Mrs. Fulton reached for his cup, and, unobservant of his face and tone, she calmly poured the coffee out. "Thar! I forgot to dash cold water into it to settle it, you hurry me so. The grounds is floatin' on top. Rake 'em off with yore fork. They won't harm you, nohow. I drink

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'em right along with what I eat. Chickens kin eat gravels, an' dogs gulp down sharp-pointed bones—why would little bits o' coffee grains hurt a human? I've seed suckin' babies swallow copper-cent pieces, an' ef little things like them kin pass off solid chunks o' metal, why should grown-up folks be so awful—"

"What's the matter with you to-night?" Abe asked, in a surly tone, as with unsteady fingers he picked out the grounds which floated on the surface of his coffee and wiped them off on his pants.

"I reckon I am in a sorter good humor," she laughed. "I'm peculiar in some ways. You see, about the only thing that rubs me the wrong way in this life generally, Abe darlin', is that I've always had sech a hard time while other folks 'round me are livin' high an' are so proud an' happy. I can't help it, but when real bad luck like the Tinsleys are havin' comes to well-to-do folks I feel like the pore way me an' you live ain't so awful bad after all. We hain't got no son to worry over like the Tinsleys have, an' ef we had in our present plight the disgrace of it wouldn't be as hard to stand with us as with them. But I was goin' to tell about Howard an' that hangin'. It happened that Howard rid over from Darley to write it up fer his paper, an' he happened to set close to me along with Frank Reymond, that folks said was goin' to put an account of it in the Atlanta papers. In fact, he did, fer I read it. I got a good look at Howard, an' he seemed powerful serious. He'd jot down a few words, an' then look about the crowd sort o' sad an' dreamy like. I noticed 'im particular, because he'd written some pieces that was mighty pretty. That was before the hangin'. But when the sheriff finally fetched the prisoner down the slope along the road that had been cut through the bushes an' was full o' stumps an' roots, you could 'a' heard a pin drop—it was so still. Women nigh me was gaspin', some was prayin', an' a few busted

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out cryin'. As long as I live, ef I live to be a hundred, I'll not be able to git Cal' Parsons' greenish, shriveled face an' bulgin' eyes out o' my mind. I've seed folks at the p'int o' death with disease; I've seed 'em scared bad over this or that, but I never seed a sight before or since like that man's face, an', in fact, his whole body. Some'n' seemed to be movin' 'im along that had nothin' to do with him. The sheriff an' deputy had to brace 'im up betwixt 'em, an' that stare, that awful, hopeless stare in his eyes! Nobody but a man lookin' an angry God in the face could have it. It's strange how a body will notice the littlest things at sech a time. I seed some turkey buzzards circlin' slow overhead in the bluest sky I ever looked at, an' wondered ef they had some sort o' sense that made 'em look on Parsons the same as they would on a dyin' cow or a pig that was to be left out in the open thar fer them to feast on. I watched Howard, an' that's why I'm sayin' what I am about him. He was as white as a sheet, an' all of a quiver. Frank was scribblin' away at a great rate, but Howard looked like he was so sorry fer Parsons that he'd forgot what he'd come fer. But he made up fer it when he got back home, fer the article he printed in *The Clarion*, you may remember, was talked about everywhere, it was so pitiful. Huh! I know well enough why he's denyin' the charge agin 'im. He hain't forgot that hangin', an' he ain't a-goin' to go through the like ef he kin help it. Folks like Mr. Daniel kin argue with 'im that to own up will bring about mercy, but a guilty man that's seed one pore chap strung up like that un that day ain't a-goin' to listen to nobody. I'd do the same—la! I'd do the same. Life is sweet, an' I'd hold on to it as long as I could. No fool confessions fer me! I'd never die like that feller did. He could hardly climb up the ladder to the platform with the trap-door on it, an' when he finally stood up thar before all an' numbled some'n' in a choky voice—well, I shet my eyes to keep

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from seein' 'im. I stuck my fingers in my ears to keep from hearin' the door as it swung down, the awful jerk o' the rope, an' the crack o' Parsons' neck. I'm shore thar is a devil, Abe, an' the same monster that tempted Parsons to kill his wife was thar to receive his soul an' hurry it to torment as soon as the body let it loose."

Silence fell. Mrs. Fulton went to the hearth for some more food and failed to notice that her husband was not eating as freely as usual. He was swallowing his food in a mechanical way, not paying any attention to her. She came back, sat down, and reached out for his plate. He extended it automatically. He was paler than any one of the audience she had described, but in the red fire-light the fact was not observable. She returned easily to the topic in hand.

"One thing that astonished me a little, Abe," she went on, "was that when Mr. Daniel just now said he thought Howard did the shootin' you disputed it with 'im—said he didn't do it."

"I didn't say it—I didn't say no sech thing!" Abe put his hands on either side of his plate and stared at her fiercely. "Thar you go with yore fool notions. You couldn't hear what I said. I—I jest said—said I thought the boy—I didn't say he didn't do it. Folks all about say he done it. Lawyers an' judges an' witnesses say he's the one, an' they know better 'n me. You'll go tattlin' with yore busy tongue till—till—well, you let the hing alone, that's what you do! Let the law take its course. He was ready to kill 'im. He armed hisse'f fer that purpose. He had no use fer 'im. Howard knowed 'im like a lot o' other folks knowed 'im, fer the devil that he was with helpless, innocent young gals."

"That reminds me, Abe," Mrs. Fulton said, curiously. "I'm not dead sure, but I thought I heard you mention poor Susy's name to Mr. Daniel. I was sort o' surprised to hear you do it, too, fer she was akin to you, an' most

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folks don't like to talk about sech delicate matters in the'r own blood. I've knowed all along how sorry you was fer Susy; but I never brought it up. Pore, pore gall! Well, Craig's dirty soul has seed her pure white un by this time. Maybe it's like a beam o' light that he kin see away off out o' his darkness but can't come nigh. The Lord 'll surely keep 'em apart thar ef He didn't here."

"Yes, I told Mr. Daniel about that," Abe faltered, after an awkward pause. "He hadn't heard o' that particular case, though he knowed all about several others."

"You are powerful tetchy, Abe darlin'," the woman went on, gently. "I'd talk plain to you, but you think a woman don't know enough to give advice to a man. A woman ain't sech a plumb fool. Sometimes she feels a thing to be risky an' unwise that a man passes over as of no consequence."

"What are you drivin' at?" Abe demanded, seriously.

"Oh, well, I don't believe in talkin' too free to a man as good even as Abner Daniel is supposed to be," was the half-shrinking answer. "Risks is risks."

"Risks? What sort o' risks? Are you plumb crazy, woman?"

"I knowed you'd fly off the handle," she said, appeasingly. "But I believe a woman has as much right to use her brain as a man has, an' I've been thinkin' about Mr. Daniel's long-drawn-out palaver."

"Long palaver?"

"Yes," she went on, more freely, for his look and tone were more inviting because more fraught with fear than anger. "He's the keenest man in this state by long odds, Abe. Folks say that he makes the best hoss an' cattle trades of anybody about here. Now, my point is this, Abe darlin': you wouldn't want pore Susy's name fetched up in public now that the pore thing is lyin' in a peaceful grave fur from home. You wouldn't like to hear it on

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everybody's tongue linked with that human scab that has got his just deserts, would you?"

"N-o; but what makes you think—"

"Why, I've got common sense, an' kin see a' inch before my nose, that's all," she interrupted. "Abner Daniel is dependin' on Howard to help 'im out with the paper he bought. It is losin' money as it stands. You heard 'im say so. Well, don't you know that he ain't goin' to leave a stone unturned to set Howard free? An' don't you see whar *you* come in? He kin have you summoned to court an' put on the stand to tell all you know agin Craig's character. Don't you see how that would stir up sympathy an' justify Howard in killin' a man o' sech a stripe?"

Abe stared speechlessly. He stroked his lips and chin with his big rough hand and avoided her gaze.

"Ah, I see you understand!" his wife cried, exultantly. "You men think us women hain't a grain o' sense, but we ain't *all* fools. Ef Abner Daniel had been talkin' to *me* about Howard I never would have let on about Susy—you bet I wouldn't. When a life's at stake folks will do anything that's dirty an' low to save it, an' you better watch Abner Daniel. Why, as little as you may think of it, Howard an' him would shoulder the thing onto *you* ef they had half a chance. It is harder to convict a prominent man than a pore friendless feller like you, Abe."

Fulton raised his eyes in a terror-filled flash, and they continued to burn as he stared fixedly.

"You don't believe they would try a—a thing like that, do you?" he cried.

"What wouldn't they try ef it offered Howard a chance of escape from the scaffold? They'd even pay money to git folks to testify agin somebody else that they could throw the blame on. Let 'im alone in the future, Abe. Daniel belongs to one set o' folks, an' you an' me to another. We mustn't give 'im a chance to fetch that pore

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gal's name into it ef we kin help it. What was it he was axin' you so close about—I mean when he axed so particular about the last time you seed Craig alive?"

"I don't know—I don't remember." Fulton started suddenly.

"It seemed to me, Abe, as well as I could hear, that he got you tangled up a little. First you said the last time you laid eyes on Craig was here at the pig-pen, an' next you said it was at the fence you was buildin'. I knowed you was wrong about the pig-pen statement, fer ef Craig had rid by here I would have seed 'im; besides, he wouldn't ride so fur out o' his way unless he had some'n' powerful important to say. You see, Abe darlin', right thar you'd be in danger, fer you are sort o' wishy-washy an' careless in yore statements. Ef Daniel *does* summon you to testify about Susy an' Craig you'll have to be powerful careful, fer a sharp lawyer will do his level best to mix you up, an' when a'boday is under oath on the stand they have to know what they are talkin' about. You remember how helpless you was when you was convicted that time."

Fulton rose clumsily to his feet. He dragged them heavily across the floor as he moved to the door. There he stood in the crude frame of decaying logs, his head bowed. Suddenly he stepped down outside and moved across the grass to the wash-bench. Wondering over his unexpected silence, his wife followed, tiptoeing softly to his side. The red light of the burning pine-sticks in the chimney behind streamed out on the black forest in front of them. She put her hand on his arm and held it, but he said nothing. Suddenly he started, uttered a gasp, and cried:

"Look! What's that comin' this way? It's a man on a hoss! Great God—it's—"

"'Tain't nothin'," the woman said, as soothingly as if he were a child frightened by dreams. "It's jest yore fancy. I've been talkin' too much about—"

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"It's thar! Thar! Oh, he's comin' to me! God have mercy! Drive 'im off—drive 'im off!"

"Don't be silly, Abe, sweetheart." The woman put her arms around his neck. "It ain't nothin' but yore fancy. I've seed sights out o' the common myse'f, but that ain't nothin'. We've been talkin' so much about killin' an' hangin' an' the like that you are plumb upset. Set down on the bench. It's cool here. I'll put up the things an' come back."

Obedying her as a child might, and trembling from head to foot, he sat down. She left him and went in to her work. She had washed and wiped the two plates and taken up a coffee-cup, when all at once she became as rigid as a stone. She held the cup in fixed hands, stared into the fire, and cried out:

"Oh, my Lord! Lord have mercy! I understand it now. Pore, pore Abel! Lord 'a' mercy—have mercy!"

CHAPTER XXXIX

CORA LANGHAM sat at a window of her room in the hotel watching the north-bound noon train draw up in the car-shed below. The porters, who had gone to meet it, stood ready to take the baggage of any passengers who wished to stop, and two or three bedraggled cabs in the care of slouching black drivers were waiting near by. Cora was looking for the return of her mother from Atlanta. Mrs. Langham had been away two days. Presently Cora saw her mother, accompanied by Sugart, leave the Pullman at the end of the train and come up the walk.

A moment later Mrs. Langham, hot and dusty, bustled into the room. "You may thank your stars that you didn't go, dear," she panted. She kissed her daughter on the cheek, and then turned to the mirror to remove her hat and dust-coated veil. "I have never suffered from the heat more in all my life. The car was like an oven. Not a drop of rain has fallen between here and home in a month. The cotton and corn are wilting in the fields. The dust was so thick that the car windows were kept closed, and the fans didn't do a bit of good. Oh, you look so cool and comfortable in that thin wrapper!"

"It hasn't been so very warm here," Cora answered, listlessly. The girl was not looking well. Her color was not so good as it had been. There were dark splotches beneath her eyes, a droop about her mouth, and a close observer might have noted that she had become slightly thinner. Dropping her hat and veil on a bed, and re-

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moving her gloves, Mrs. Langham grasped a palm-leaf fan and began to use it.

"I'll have a bath as soon as I am cooler," she said, taking a seat near Cora. "I know you are anxious to hear the news from home. Well, there is nothing of the least importance going on. Everybody we know is still away. The Trabues came back, roasted one day in their tight little house, and hurried off to Tate Springs. They don't spend any money keeping up a home, and so they can afford trips now and then. The Wilsons are still at Asheville, and Harry Wynn is there tagging on after Ida. People say she is as big a fool as he is, although she is ten years older and ought to have more sense than to encourage him."

"How did you find the house?" Cora asked, indifferently.

"Oh, all right, but the grass has suffered in the front yard. It looks dry and parched. I found out one particular thing that set my mind at rest."

"What was that, mother?"

"You know, I guess," Mrs. Langham replied. "Why, I found that we have not been connected in the slightest with that Howard Tinsley affair. Even your father did not mention it. I determined to see if people were talking, and found that not one word had been said. You know, if there was any gossip Cousin Tilly would have heard it and brought it straight to me; but I chatted with her fully an hour, and she didn't mention it. I let it worry me entirely too much. Very few happened to see the notice of Howard's visit to us, and if any of our set did they failed to connect him with the news of the murder. Society folks in a city don't read such news, anyway, especially when it is about a thing that happened in a small, out-of-the-way place like this. I never felt so relieved in my life. I almost held my breath in suspense when I first met Cousin Tilly, and when I found that she was ready to chat about every beau you ever had except

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Howard Tinsley I could have hugged her. Well, that's over with. Is there any fresh news about him?"

"Nothing particular," Cora answered.

"Then he hasn't owned up yet?"

"No, and from what some of his best friends say he never will. Mother, you remember Mary Trumbley?"

"Yes, of course. What about her?"

"They say she is a most remarkable girl." Cora's eyes were now stealthily probing her mother's face. "Frank Reymond was telling me about her. He can't talk of anything else. You knew she went to work on Howard's paper, didn't you?"

"I think I heard you say something about it; but what of that?"

Cora took a deep breath and tried to appear unconcerned. She glanced toward the table, where a fresh copy of *The New Clarion* lay, and swept a guarded glance on to her mother's flushed face.

"The papers all around, even the big dailies, are saying her work is wonderful—simply wonderful. People here in town, too, and all through the country are admiring it. I've just been reading one of her editorials. I can tell which are hers. They really are good. The style is smooth, direct, and beautiful. They are full of high ideas—some are like essays of the best class. She—mother, she has stuck to Howard from the first day of—of his great trouble. Frank Reymond says that there has not been a single issue of the paper which has not contained a strong article from her about—about the inhumanity of accusing a person falsely. He says—Frank says—that her articles are beginning to have a wonderful effect on public opinion. People are not so sure now that Howard has not told the truth all along. His friends—his true girl friends—are sending him flowers and notes of encouragement, and even strangers are writing him kind, hopeful letters."

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"Well, that's all right," Mrs. Langham said, coldly. "Even if he is found guilty at his trial it will be a comfort to Mary to know that she did so much for him."

"But he may *not* be found guilty—in fact, many now don't believe he will. They say that no guilty man could stand up as Howard is doing under such a charge and put such a brave face on the matter. They are reading what he writes and saying that his articles don't sound as if they came from a—*a* guilty person. It is all due to—*to* Mary Trumbley. She brought it about. Frank says Howard was too dejected to hold up his head till she took his place on the paper and began to visit the jail every day and cheer him up. Mother, most persons think money is an advantage in life. I begin to think it is a serious drawback. If Mary Trumbley had been a rich society girl an opportunity of this sort could not have come to her. I'd rather live on a farm at the foot of a mountain, as she does, and be able to do what she is doing than to marry a millionaire and live in a mansion in New York or London."

"Oh, bosh!" Mrs. Langham sniffed. "Of course, it is good for her to have such a talent, for that's all the poor girl has, and she deserves something to vary the monotony of her hard life; but you—why, there is nothing you may not have that you want. You will have a lot of money. You will marry sensibly, and you will get far more out of life than the average woman."

"I'm afraid you don't understand me, mother," Cora ventured, softly. "For a long time I did not understand myself; but I am beginning to do so. I have read of society women who became tired of the empty lives they led and longed for something different—something higher and more noble, more peaceful. Girls with ten times the social advantages that I have have become nuns. I used to think such women were crazy—I don't now. They

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simply know the full meaning of life—the *infinite* meaning of it, that's all."

"I'm sorry I left you alone," Mrs. Langham said, rather sharply. "You have been getting worse and worse. You are too introspective, always inquiring into yourself. After all, this quiet place has not been good for you. You have had too much time on your hands. If you act this way with your father he will get out of patience with you and blame me. He expects us to do more entertaining this winter than usual. He has certain irons in the fire which he says we can help along by being nice to people. You've got to pull yourself together. If I didn't think you had more sense than to do so I'd be afraid you were actually interested in Howard Tinsley."

"Why, mother!" Cora's glance sank, and her lips twitched. "Don't you know he is in love with Mary Trumbley?" she faltered. "He couldn't help it after—after all that has taken place recently. As for me, he hates me—that's what he does; he hates me. I've never sent him a single word of encouragement. I was afraid, you see, to stand by him. I suppose I am still. I am a coward. He'd been a friend to me, but I deserted him the moment he got into trouble. You influenced me to do it. I had no will of my own—I haven't yet, as for that matter. I really don't know how I feel toward him. As long as everybody was saying he was guilty and would disgrace all his friends I felt that I had a right, considering my position, to ignore our past friendship; but now that they are saying he may be reinstated and come out a hero I—I—oh, mother, how could I meet him face to face after that? I'd burn up with shame. But Mary Trumbley won't be ashamed. She not only believes in him, but she's doing his work—saving his business, holding him up, and turning the public to him. Frank Reymond says—and he's no idle gossip; he's a close observer, and he has seen them together at the jail. Frank is good-hearted, and

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his voice shook with emotion the other day as he told me how she and Howard stood and talked through the bars. Oh, they love each other—they do—they do! God made them suffer side by side like this for some good purpose. God is making me tired of the empty life I lead for some purpose. I must be more useful than I am or—or—mother, listen! Don't be shocked, but, frankly, I can't stand it. I can't go back to Atlanta and go through another season such as we usually spend. I want more to hide me and my misery than low-cut, flimsy evening gowns adorned with jewels. I want something—I don't know what it is, but I am famishing for something I've never had. I can't *live*—do you understand that? I can't live unless—unless I get peace—yes, that's it—peace. There is such a thing. I've read of men and women seeking it till they found it; but they did not find it in show or worldly possessions. They found it in God and humility. I've prayed and prayed and prayed for it. I prayed hours and hours last night here on my knees by my bed, and got up feeling as miserable as before. I am unworthy. I wouldn't have turned against Howard Tinsley as I did if I had been worthy. I'll never be worthy till I can stand a test such as Mary Trumbley has stood, and such a chance may never come to me now."

Cora suddenly covered her face with her hands, and with her elbows on her knees she swayed back and forth, uttering low ejaculations of despair. A startled and yet crafty expression took possession of Mrs. Langham's face, which had hardened as from the pallor which had overspread it. She reflected for a moment, then she said, clearing her voice in the effort to steady it:

"Cora, dear, you alarm me—you really do. You've always been sensible till now. I'm afraid you are taking a wrong turn. The truth is that you inherit family tendencies that I never have approved of. Your father's mother was a religious fanatic of the Quaker order, and

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two of her daughters went to extremes and acted absurdly. I thought till now that your position in society—your duty to your father and me—would keep you from being that way. Really, you upset me frightfully. I see it all. It is this trouble of Howard Tinsley's. You ought never to have met such a man as he. You are allowing your conscience to bother you in a silly, fanciful way. You think he is innocent; you think he is being abused, and you have been comparing yourself to another girl who the Lord knows could not act otherwise than she is acting. She is a poor mountain girl that has nothing at all at stake. In fact, his imprisonment has helped her show her talents to advantage, and it will be well for her, no matter what happens to him. Now listen to me. I see what is the matter with you. You've let Frank Raymond and some of the others who wish Howard well mislead you. They have made you believe that the tide has turned in Howard's favor. In your mind you see him liberated and wholly reinstated, but the simple truth is that the affair stands exactly where it stood the day he was arrested. Now I'm going to make a little confession, and you must forgive me, but I could not see my duty in any other way. I've watched you a good deal, and I admit I have been disturbed by your odd interest in Howard Tinsley, which you could not hide from me. You knew, as I knew, that you could not think seriously of marrying him, and yet that obstacle itself seemed to increase your interest in him. When you entertained him at our house that day you showed by your desire not to admit other callers that you wanted him to yourself. You had never acted so with any other man. You were excited unduly. You wanted to make a good impression. I don't know what passed between you. I might have listened, but I was unable to do so without your knowing it, and—"

"I'll tell you." Cora uncovered her face and, with

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piteous eyes, stared straight at her mother. "That very visit separated me and him forever. He saw the sort of life I clung to, and if—if he had ever thought of marrying me he gave it up then. I saw it in his face—in his strong, manly face. I read his contempt for every bit of gaudy display we made that day. Later I would have given my right arm to have been able to despise it as he did. But the situation was worse than even that, and he knew it. He had been holding off; I thought he was leaning to Mary Trumbley, and I resorted to that contemptible subterfuge. I thought—oh, I thought that perhaps when he saw me—well, as I live at home—he would—would be influenced as other men have been and—and declare himself. If he had done so he would have been like all the rest, and I probably would have ceased to think of him, but he rose above it. He read my very thoughts, shrank from me then, and studiously avoided me afterward. That was the contemptible test I put him to—later on he put me to one; he was publicly humiliated, and I deserted him—I deserted him, and another woman took my place. She stood the ordeal. Mother, Howard Tinsley is the noblest man I ever knew, and the most abused."

"Wait, wait till you know *everything*," Mrs. Langham said, gravely. "The man is not what you think he is, and there lies the trouble with you. You are idealizing a very ordinary person. If he had killed that man impulsively or in anger he might deserve *some* little consideration; but the fact that he is deliberately lying to save his neck—"

"Don't, mother, don't, don't!" Cora broke in, almost fiercely.

"I stick to it. I know what I am talking about. I have not been unconcerned. Now comes my real confession, if you want to call it that. As I said, I have been worried over all this, and down home yesterday I heard that

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Hamilton Quinby, of this place, who stands at the top of his profession as a criminal lawyer, was at the Kimball House, and I wrote to him. I asked for a private interview, and he came out home to see me. Well, I confided in him—to some extent, at least. He is trustworthy. I did not compromise you—I simply hinted at Howard's attentions to you and told him that I wanted to know if he thought Howard was guilty or not. What do you think he said—and he the sharpest, keenest criminal lawyer that I ever met? Why, he actually laughed at the idea of Howard's innocence. He said, in confidence, that he had refused to defend Howard simply because of the absurd and fatal claim of innocence that he insisted on making. He had looked into the case carefully and was willing to take it up in a reasonable way; but Howard was advised by that silly old farmer, Abner Daniel, to hold out for complete exoneration. Mr. Quinby was really so much out of patience with them both that he got red in the face and fairly stammered while he talked. He said that the young lawyer who now has the case in charge is inexperienced in criminal practice, and misled by a strong personal friendship for Howard and willingness to believe his story. Darling, you really must be sensible. You have let your sympathies run away with you. When the case comes to trial all sentiment will be put aside. The plain truth will be brought out, and Mr. Quinby says there is not a shadow of doubt about Howard's guilt. You can't—you simply can't afford to think any more about it. The law justifies a woman in leaving her husband when he becomes a convict, and Heaven knows you are under no obligation to a passing acquaintance who is certain to be a convict, if not worse."

"I don't believe he is guilty," Cora said, sharply. "I don't care what Hamilton Quinby says. Last night I read an article Howard wrote for his paper. Frank Raymond called my attention to it. It is full of gentleness and

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forgiveness and wonderful spiritual uplift. His great trouble has opened his eyes as mine is opening mine. I am sick with shame at leaving him in the lurch. I may never have another chance to be a real woman. I've been tried and found wanting in moral courage; I have been forced to stand by and see a woman with more soul than I have obey God's holy law, while I was bound to the things of the world. I—I don't say I love Howard—I don't know why I should feel this way"—tears were rising to Cora's eyes—"I am simply a human sponge from which the great hand of God is squeezing out unworthiness. My feeling for Howard may never have been actual love. But, mother, as God is above, I've *lost* something—that expresses it. I've *lost* something out of life. I think I could have had Howard's love. When I first met him he was attracted to me. He used to take me, you know, for drives and walks, and I loved to hear him talk on all sorts of subjects. I liked to dispute with him. I denied his statements simply to hear him contend for his view. That was when—when I was his—his ideal. Later on I saw his faith in me shaking, gradually dwindling. The very eyes of his soul seemed to blink at me in pained regret. He wanted me to be what I wasn't then—what it was impossible for me to be, blinded as I was by my sordid possessions and environment. He might pity me if he knew me as I am now, but he could never turn back and care for me. It is too late. I have no right to him. He belongs to another, and—mother, she is a better woman than I am or ever could be."

Cora covered her face with her hands. Her mother saw a shudder of emotion rise in her frame and a sudden sob shake it. Mrs. Langham started to speak, but could think of nothing adequate to a situation so profound; and, with a helpless look on her face, she rose and moved away.

In her own room Mrs. Langham stood at a window look-

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ing out into the sunshine. "Poor, poor girl!" she said. "I must get her away from here. She needs a change of scene. She is fancying all sorts of silly things. She will think she is in love with him next, and when the worst comes her whole life will be wrecked."

CHAPTER XL

A FEW evenings later Abner Daniel was walking after supper on the grass in front of Trumbley's house. It was his usual early bedtime, but he had no inclination to sleep. Mary had been his companion for more than an hour, and they had been talking of their work and, above all, of Howard's trouble, but she had gone into the house, and he was facing the grim problem alone. Both of them were depressed by the lack of material progress they were making toward a hopeful solution of the matter. In fact, they had been that day discouraged by Barnett's unconcealed fear of the situation. Not a particle of proof had turned up which would tend to offset the mass of evidence which the prosecution had gathered with such surety of success. For the lack of anything else to do, Abner strolled to the fence, and, leaning on it, he looked down the long moonlit road. Suddenly at the bend of it he saw the blurred figure of a man come into view, pause for a moment, and then move on toward him with what seemed to be an uncertain, hesitating step. The gate stood between the trunks of two large oaks, and into the shadow of one of them Abner sank and stood peering out furtively. On came the man till he was in front of the gate, and there he stopped, his gaze on the house. Abner distinctly heard him take a deep breath and exhale it like a sigh. Then, looking more closely, Abner recognized Abe Fulton. Seized by a sudden desperate impulse toward fresh activity, Abner stepped to the gate, and opening it advanced boldly toward Fulton.

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With a low grunt of fear and surprise, the latter turned and was about to flee the spot when Abner uttered a soft, reassuring laugh. "Huh! I scared you," he chuckled. "I didn't mean to, Abe. I drapped my tobacco at the foot o' that oak an' was down on my all-fours rootin' about in the grass like a hog tryin' to find it. I'll have to wait till mornin', I reckon. Do you happen to have a chaw about you? I always take one before I turn in."

With blearing eyes Fulton fumbled in his pocket and produced a bit of tobacco. Abner twisted off a small piece and put it into his mouth and returned the remainder.

"Thank you, Abe," he laughed, softly, removing his hat and wiping his brow. "You fellers that work with the body hain't the least idea how hard a job it is to run a paper that has to be run fer the most part by the brain. Here I am at this time o' night, when I used to be in bed, after a day's plowin' or hay-cuttin', worryin' over how to write some'n'. Single tax is in the wind, an' some o' our readers want to know about it. I read a lot to-day in Henry George's book, but gittin' it down in a few direct words is the devil of a task. I'm so befuddled I hardly know which end o' me is up. I reckon you hain't never bothered much about single tax or the government ownership o' land, have you?"

"N-o," Abe said, still staring, "I hain't. I don't know nor care what you mean. Law ain't fer sech as me, no-how. Pore, hard-run men have to keep on the lookout to git bread an' meat. Land-ownin' ain't botherin' me."

"Ah, I see," Abner responded, carelessly. "Which way are you headed at this time o' night? Late fer you to be out, ain't it?"

"I wasn't goin' nowhar," Abe replied, hesitatingly. "I've had a headache to-day, an' my legs git so cramped an' drawn from rheumatiz that I can't git rid of the pain in the left one below the knee. I 'lowed walkin' about would do a little good."

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"Try a hard trottin'-hoss on a' all-day trip over the mountains, an' you'll ache in so many other spots when it's over that you'll forget the one in the leg." Abner's tone was one of amusing good will and friendship. "At the blacksmith's shop in the edge o' town this mornin' the feller that was blowing the bellows, Abe, said you'd jest passed along an' axed ef he'd seed me. Was it any-thing particular you wanted?"

Fulton started and blinked helplessly. His slow mind was rendered more sluggish by the sudden unexpected demand upon its activity.

"No, I—I didn't want nothin'," he said, haltingly. "Nothin' at all. I was jest wonderin' ef you'd passed along. I—I—" The voice died away.

Abe looked toward the full moon and stood stroking the bristling, week-old beard on his chin, his lips falling apart, his features working under contending forces.

"Oh, I'll bet you *did* want to see me." Abner spat to one side as he went on easily: "You are jest a little back-'ard an' slow to come to a thing, Abe. I used to be that way myself till politics, tradin' hosses, an' one thing or other learnt me that it wouldn't do. I'll bet you did want to see me—in fact, I'll bet that's why you came along by here to-night an' stopped like you did."

The man offered no denial, and of this Abner made a mental note. He also noted the wavering silence of the man as he stood as still as a post, his eyes on the ground. Reaching out, Abner gently laid his hand on his arm. Abe drew back impulsively, as if he had been struck.

"I *did* want to see you," he blurted out. "I hain't been right in my mind here lately. Sometimes I don't know what I'm sayin' or doin'. My wife has noticed it an' called my attention to it several times."

"Ah, he is goin' to own up an' claim mental unsoundness," Abner reflected, while a sudden glow of hope suffused him. "He's sharp enough to know that it will

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strengthen his claim." Then, aloud to Fulton, he said: "A man ain't accountable fer what he does when he's that way, Abe, especially ef he's all keyed up in pity over somebody bein' harmed or wronged—some helpless person that he hated to see suffer."

Fulton seemed so much absorbed over what he was now bent on saying that Abner's words fell on closed ears. "I was havin' one o' my worst spells t'other evenin' when you was out lookin' fer yo' hoss. I'd been feelin' so bad that I drunk a lot o' whisky just 'fore you come. I thought that would clear up my mind; but I tuck too much. I drunk mighty nigh a pint, all told. I was jest gittin' under the influence of it when I was talkin' to you, an' after you left I was plumb soaked. My wife overheard the ramblin' way I was talkin' to you, an' when I come in—or it was the next mornin', when my mind was clear—she told me—she told me she had never heard anybody say sech ridiculous things in 'er life."

"Ridiculous?" Abner's heart sank in sheer dismay over the unexpected stand the man was taking. Ridiculous? Did you say ridiculous, Abe?"

"Yes; an' I've been tryin' to remember what it was I *did* say that night. I think, among other things, we talked about—about—"

"Yes, we talked about Craig an' Howard Tinsley," Abner went on, fiercely, for the course Fulton was taking had upset one of his best hopes. "You said you was sorry fer the boy—you said he'd done you favors, an' you seemed to think, though I didn't fully agree with you at the time, that Howard was tellin' the truth."

"I may have said it," Abe went on, insisently, keeping his desperate gaze on a wheel-cut rut in the road, which he was nervously kicking with the toe of his coarse shoe. "I don't git full often, but when I do I slobber over an' sometimes cry about the least thing. My wife said I cried about Howard when I got to bed after you left that

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night, an' said he was bein' treated wuss'n a dog. That was odd, too, fer I don't know a thing about the case. I reckon Howard is as nice as the general run o' boys; but everybody knows he has a hot temper, an' armed hisse'f an' went lookin' fer his man."

"Yes, he has a hot temper." Abner was speaking at random in an effort to get his bearings. Never before had he felt his ingenuity put to such a bewildering test, and his hope of rescuing Howard was becoming less and less as he realized the safe ground Fulton now stood upon. Was it possible that the wits of a man of this low type could defeat his own?

"I'm goin' to quit drinkin' even fer my health," Abe went on, the glare of a half-insane man in his eyes. "You must 'a' thought I was a plumb idiot that night, an' I must 'a' been actually stinkin' with the liquor."

"I didn't smell it on you, Abe. I was bothered about my hoss, an' the hard work me an' Mary have on our hands in the office. You can have no idea how awful it is to be in sech a tight place as me'n' her are in."

"I remember a little bit o' what I said—jest sort o' like a dream, you know, Mr. Daniel. I think maybe I talked about—about my Cousin Susy Thomas an' her trouble. Bein' out o' my head that way, an' thar bein' so much talk about—about Craig's bad reputation with women, I reckon I got the pore gal mixed up with him some way in my silly mind. She *did* have trouble like that, but a young feller I knowed about that used to run as brakeman on the W. & A. road was the one that was to blame. He deserted her all right enough, an' run away somewhar. I—I must give the devil his due, an' Craig, with all that is said agin 'im, ortn't to be blamed with— with another feller's deeds."

"I see, I see," Abner said, helplessly. "But she did—you said, I believe, that you got word back from Texas that the pore gal died out thar."

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There was just a hint of hesitation, such as a witness on the stand in court might show in the desire to make an accurate statement, then:

"Yes, she died—she did die out thar, Mr. Daniel; but it was from weak lungs—consumption. It was in her family. She was always puny-like."

"Then the operation you mentioned?" Abner suggested. "She didn't die from that?"

Again Fulton deliberated before speaking. Finally, in response to Abner's steady stare, he said: "I don't know that thar *was* any operation, but some folks that was in a position to know said that the young feller did give Susy some concoction or other that wasn't good fer her, an' may have hurried the pore gal to 'er grave. I don't know. I know, though, that I'm goin' to let whisky alone hereafter, Mr. Daniel. It won't do when it plumb upsets a man like I was that night. I didn't have any sense at all. For instance, you know, I couldn't recall exactly when it was that I last seed Craig 'fore he was shot. I made two different statements, one on the heels o' t'other. I said once that I was at the new wire fence at Craig's, an' then at my pig-pen at home; but now that I'm plumb sober an' got all my senses, I remember that it was at my pig-pen that I last seed 'im."

"I see, I see," Abner said, gently. "An' I reckon it was to straighten out all this that you was inquiren' about me at the blacksmith's shop, Abe?"

"Yes, I thought I'd git it straight ef I run across you an' had a talk."

"An' that's what you was lookin' fer me to-night fer?" Abner led him on gently.

"Yes," Abe nodded. "I wanted you to have a plumb straight tale. I didn't see no use o' lettin' you believe what wasn't so."

"Then it *wasn't* to git rid o' yore headache an' the pain in yore leg, as you fust stated?" Abner fairly shot the

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words into Abe's face, and with fiercely fixed eyes stood waiting.

Fulton started, dropped his glance to the ground, and dug his foot deeper into the dust of the road. He seemed unable to think, unable to formulate any logical response. The things he had carefully prepared to say had fallen glibly enough from his lips, but already he had been entrapped into contradiction. He felt himself to be as dough in a wily man's hands. Moreover, the sudden fierce vindictiveness in Abner's tone and attitude filled him with a terror which he could not disguise or conquer.

"I've told you all I'm goin' to tell you," Fulton finally uttered, in a guttural, defiant voice. "You said yorese'f t'other night that Howard done it. Drunk as I was then, I may 'a' disagreed with you, but in thinkin' it over, an' hearin' all that's said agin 'im, I now know he is the one. Several things p'int that way. Oh yes, he's the one!"

CHAPTER XLI

ABNER made no reply. Glancing a few yards ahead, he saw his wagon under a spreading beech at the roadside, and for some reason which he failed to make known he moved toward it. It was as if he had forgotten the presence of his companion. With a slow look of uneasy wonder Fulton followed.

"Yes, lots an' lots o' things p'int to Howard," Abe went on, almost in a tone of appeal. "I can't blame 'im, though, Mr. Daniel, fer Craig cussed 'im to his face several times, an' Howard always was high-strung an' easy to git mad."

They reached the wagon, and Abner put his hand on the detachable spring-seat. "Git 'round t'other side, Abe, an' he'p me down with it. I'm goin' to have a feller haul some stove-wood from the mountain to-morrow, an' I don't want 'im to take this seat along. It fills up too much, considerin' that he's to be paid by the load."

Abe obeyed. He went around to the other side, and he and Abner lifted the seat over the wagon-pole and put it against the trunk of the beech. "Let's set down awhile, Abe, I'm sorter tired," Abner said, with a little yawn, sinking upon the seat and crossing his slim legs. "Set down—set down, Abe."

Like an automaton Fulton complied, staring at the ground. Abner saw his knees trembling under their ragged coverings. The sight of the cowed, desperate creature touched his heart, and a tone of real sympathy,

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that was not without effect on its object, filled his voice when he next spoke.

"This is a sad, sad old world, Abe," he began. "I've been in it a long time, an' I hain't seed much else but trouble on every hand. I wish I could be a good man, but I can't always manage it. I'll feel better to-night, though, ef I make a clean breast to you about some'n' I done. You may think it is a small matter, but it ain't to me. I actually lied to you t'other night. I intimated that I thought Howard was guilty. In tryin' to do a little good—in tryin' to find some way to help that pore stricken boy an' his heartbroken mammy, I drapped into my old tricky way o' talkin' that I acquired when I was younger an' traded a lot with keen fellers that had no conscience an' killed what little I had. The truth is, Abe, that I was so anxious to find out ef you could throw any light on the matter t'other night that I led out by accusin' Howard myse'f. I saw you was friendly to 'im, an' I knowed that 'u'd set you to talkin', an' it did—you know it did."

Fulton laid his splaying hands on his knees to steady them, but he kept his eyes averted. "I didn't know you was foolin' me then, Mr. Daniel; but I did after I thought it over," he said, huskily. "Then I seed yore hand, an' got ready fer you. Ef you want the truth, you may have it hot from my box, Mr. Daniel. I seed what you thought, but you hain't got a smidgen o' proof—not a smidgen agin me. An' ef I am tryin' to defend myse'f now it is because I've got to. I know what you think, an' that's enough fer me. I know you are ðne o' the keenest men in the country; but I ain't goin' to let you bully me. Ef—ef you had any proof you would throw the whole blame on me an' clear yore man, but you hain't got no proof—the proof all lies some'r's else."

"You are right, I hain't got no proof, Abe," Daniel returned, sadly; "but la, me! what does that matter?"

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Look up at that sky—see them stars! This earth me'n' you are on is so big that you nor me nor nobody else kin grasp the size of it in the mind, an' yit thar are countless other globes up thar a million times bigger'n this un, an' they are all revolvin' in perfect order. All that can be seed with the bodily eye, Abe, but it ain't nothin' to what is invisible. I believe the more speritual a man gits the more he knows thar is some'n' in what can't be seed by the eyes or touched by the hands. I was fetched up in an old-fashioned way, as you was too, I reckon, by folks that believed it was an awful sin to doubt a thing outside the church. I remember how rabid my pa was agin a little body o' Speritualists that helt services an' spook meetin's nigh us. He said the farmer's wife they claimed to git sperit news from was the very agent o' destruction, an' ef he'd had his way he would 'a' had her hung as a witch. One o' the converts to the thing was a lawyer that was doin' a pretty fair practice in town in spite o' his unpopular belief. Well, one o' my cousins had a husband who died an' left his affairs in a tangle. Money was comin' to 'er, but her claim—a perfectly valid one—had to be passed on by the courts. She was sick in bed, an' axed me to git a good honest lawyer that would attend to it. I fust went to a big man that stood high up in our church, taught a class in Sunday-school, an' the like. He drawed a long face, spoke about how hard the work would be, an' finally said he'd put it through fer half o' what was comin' to the widow. I 'lowed that was too steep, Abe, an' I went to another feller that was a member of another denomination. He acted the same way an' wanted the same fee—said it was the custom. It struck me as bein' without a speck o' religion or human pity, an' so I wouldn't close with nuther one o' them. Then in actual desperation I stepped into the office o' the Speritualist an' explained what I wanted. He acted different right on the start. He thought a little an' said,

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finally, that it wasn't much of a job—that my cousin's papers an' proof was so plain that the court wouldn't delay in puttin' it through. Then I axed 'im what his fee would be, an' he made it so low that it wasn't worth mentionin'. I turned the business over to him, an' he put it through without hitch or hobble. And after the widow was paid in full I axed 'im why he was so reasonable in his charges. 'Because,' said he, 'accordin' to my religion, it would be wrong to act unfair.' Then he went on to say some powerful sensible things. He said that he knowed as well as he knowed anything that the sperit o' my cousin's husband was right thar on the spot demandin' justice to his wife an' children, an', said he, 'I'm bound to meet that sperit in eternity, sooner or later, an' I've got to meet it with love an' sympathy.' Well, right thar I l'arnt, Abe, that thar's hardly a religion in the world, no matter what the brand is, that won't do good to the one that follows it. Do you catch on to what I'm drivin' at, Abe?"

"No, I don't," muttered the quivering mass on the seat. "I don't see what—what that's got to do with you an' me or—or—anybody else."

"Well, I do ef you don't, Abe, an' I'm here to say that I am convinced that folks can't keep on doin' wrong, even ef they try. The very laws o' the universe are agin it. Every day you pick up a paper an' read how some feller has toted crime on his soul fer years an' years an' finally come forward of his own free will an' dumped it off in open confession. Abe, yore ma is dead—passed on—hain't she?"

"Yes," slowly drawled Fulton. "She died when I was a boy."

"She was a good woman, I'll be bound, Abe. Wasn't she?"

"Yes."

"Do you know whar I think she is, Abe? She's som'er's

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whar God's light is brighter 'n it is here. Who knows, she may be able to come nigh you an' throw her holy influence about you? Bein' more like God than she was here on earth, she may have gloried in the pity you had fer that pore cousin o' yore'n that was so weak an' ill-treated. She may have thought that yore great wrath agin Craig was beautiful and even divine. She may have felt that in doin' what you done you was an agent fer good—fer we know that God Hisse'f condemns sech creatures an' scourges 'em with the lash o' conscience; but, Abe! Abe! listen to me. The Sperit o' yore ma may be uneasy now, fer she sees you waverin' on the brink of a lastin' wrong. She sees you under the greatest temptation o' yore whole life, an' no doubt she's afeard you won't be strong enough to resist. She knows that you know an innocent young fellow is sufferin' fer some'n' he never done; an', for all we know, she may be standin' here at this minute pleadin' with you the best she kin not to take a false step. It may be her that's makin' me say this to you. Abe, it is fer you to decide. You kin walk straight ahead into God's light, or you kin stumble on into the devil's darkness. I know you want to act right. I kin see it in yore sufferin' face an' uneasy way, but yore flesh is weak. You are afeard o' man's puny law. But ef you was to come right out an' tell the whole thing from beginnin' to end—how Susy Thomas was treated, an' how you felt at the sight o' that blusterin', man-shaped fiend, active in fresh devilment, the judge, the jury, the entire public would shout yore name everywhar as a man that fought fer right an' is still fightin' fer it."

Abe's shaggy head sank lower. He was shivering as from cold. A stupor like that of drunkenness was on him. His breath came and went through his great, hair-lined nostrils with an audible sound. He was silent for several minutes, during which time Abner sat still and mute. Presently Abner was moved to speak again. He

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put his arm around the quivering shoulders; he let it rest gently on the broad back of the man as if to quiet the tumult within.

"As God hears me speak at this minute, Abe," he said, "I believe thar is sech a thing as man lovin' his neighbor, an' when the neighbor is in trouble right then the love is felt more. I'm sorry fer you, Abe, an' I want to see you act right, fer it is the only way out o' difficulty. Abe, you are goin' to do the fair thing, ain't you?"

Fulton suddenly shrank under Abner's touch; a shudder ran through him. He turned his distorted face to Abner. It was the face of a fiend goaded by despair.

"Huh!" he snarled. He rose and stood swaying to and fro like a reed in a wind-storm. "You are jest up to yore old sly tricks. All you have jest said is to lead me into a trap. You need Howard Tinsley in yore business. Yore paper is goin' to ruin, and you think ef I—I—oh, I see through you! Look here, Abner Daniel! You know you hain't got a feather's weight o' proof agin me. You are tryin' to bluff me. You are playin' a sly game, you are, but it won't work. You kin set thar chawin' tobacco to-night with a nice bed waitin' fer you, an' advise me to—to—oh, you know what I mean well enough, but—"

Abner rose to his feet. He endeavored to step nearer the man, but, like an animal once tamed and grown wild again, Fulton slunk farther away.

"You let me alone, Abner Daniel," he muttered, sullenly. "You stop doggin' me an' dingdongin' this thing at me. I ain't goin' ter put up with it from you nor nobody else. Thar is a p'int you hain't thought about yit, an' it's a big un. Do you want to know what it is? One man is already down on the docket to testify that he seed Howard at Craig's gate jest a little while 'fore the—the shot was fired. What ef another feller livin' in the neighborhood was to say—was to swear that he seed

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even more 'n that—heard more 'n that? By God, how does that strike you?"

"It don't strike me at all, Abe," Abner answered, with a bluntness he could not restrain. "A man as guilty as you are couldn't stand up before a court full o' honest men an' tell a tale o' that sort an' make it go down. One look at you straight in the face would tell more in a second than you could make up in a month. The angels round the throne would tie yore tongue in a knot. Abe, you've got to do the right thing. God in heaven is goin' to *make* you do it. Do you understand? He's goin' to *make* you do it."

Abe swayed back and forth. He drew an unsteady hand over his slobbering mouth and dripping chin. He removed his hat and wiped his brow, which gleamed like that of a corpse in the moonlight. Then he began to move away, his face still toward Abner.

"I give you fair warnin'," he muttered. "You keep me out o' this thing. I see what you are tryin' to do, but it won't work. It won't! It won't!"

The next moment he turned and stalked off down the road in the moonlight.

Abner stood watching him till he was out of sight, then with a heavy heart he turned toward the gate. He had reached it, and had his hand on the latch, when he heard a soft whistle from the direction of the barn, and, glancing there, he saw the figure of a man emerge from the shadow of the stable and approach. It was Pole Baker.

"Don't fly off the handle, Uncle Ab," Pole said, half apologetically. "I give you my word I ain't interferin' with you in this thing at all."

"Well, what do you mean by turnin' up so dang often?" Abner inquired. "Seems to me that I never see this feller without runnin' on you like a p'inter dog squattin' behind a stump some'r's."

"It's this way, Uncle Ab," Pole laughed softly. "I

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know you are runnin' this thing, an' I don't intend to bother you in the least; but I'm feelin' so bad over the little progress that's made that I thought ef I watched Abe like a hawk I mought by some accident drap onto a little some'n' that mought he'p you out."

"Well, have you—that's what I'd like to know?" Abner leaned on the fence, a picture of utter dejection.

"I've seed enough to know that Abe is as restless as the devil hisse'f goin' about seekin' some'n' to devour. I've seed 'im a dozen times when he thought nobody was lookin'. For one thing, I noticed that he goes regular every day down in the big swamp below his cabin. He's wore a little path o' his own in the weeds an' grass. An' t'other day, when I knowed he was off in town, I slipped down thar. But I didn't find nothin', Uncle Ab, except that his tracks come to a' end at a particular spot in the thickest part o' the swamp. I couldn't make nothin' of it except that he jest loved to go to some one quiet spot."

"I see, an' so *that* come to nothin'," Abner sighed.

"I actually don't know," Pole returned; "but it give me an idea. I knowed I could kiver my tracks, an' so day before yesterday I went down thar before he did an' hid myse'f as nigh the spot as I could with safety. I lay down flat in the bulrushes an' waited fer him to come. It was a long wait, an' not pleasant, fer the gnats an' mosquitoes fairly chawed the meat off my bones; but after a while I heard 'im a-comin'. The spot was mighty shady, an' I couldn't see his face good, but I heard 'im mumblin' some'n' to hisse'f. Then he set in to swingin' his arms about 'im, an' I heard 'im groanin' like he was in torment."

"Then—*then* what did he do?" Abner leaned forward, a look of tense eagerness on him as he spoke.

"Why, he started to go back," Pole replied. "He plunged into the cane-brake an' willows, an' I heard 'im threshin' his way through the bushes at a great rate. I

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was about to crawl out an' slip after 'im when I seed 'im come back. He stood twistin' his hands over his head an' behin' his back, an' then all at once he fell flat on his all-fours an' stuck his face right in the mire. Then, Uncle Ab, I heard 'im prayin'. I couldn't catch what he was sayin', fer it was mostly groans an' grunts, but I heard 'im callin' on God. I heard 'im sayin': 'God help me— God have mercy!'"

"You heard that, did you?" Abner exclaimed. "Are you sure you heard that?"

"Yes, but that was all, Uncle Ab, an' I've been mad at myse'f ever since fer not runnin' on some'n' worth while. I hate like rips to be beat in this thing."

Abner was silent for a moment, then he looked at Pole with a grateful smile. "I'm glad you watched 'im. When you come just now I had plumb lost hope myself, but I feel better now. Pole, the whole truth, proof an' all, is locked up in Abe Fulton's heart an' soul. I've been hopin' that I could stir up pity in 'im an' git 'im to do the right thing before God an' man, an' I've been workin' to that end; but he said some'n' jest now that made me lose faith in that plan. In fact, I was beginnin' to fear that his conscience was dead, but it ain't—it ain't quite. Pole, a man-killer that prays to God while his hands are wet with his victim's blood ain't hopeless. You didn't know it, but you've brought me the only news that could keep my hopes alive. Good night, Pole; I must go in."

"Good night, Uncle Ab. I'm due at home, too. I ain't a prayin' man, but I feel like it sometimes—I feel like it when I hear a feller like you talk as you are a-doin' now. You are the best all-round link betwixt this world and the next that I ever run across, an' ef I ever git to heaven it will be by hangin' on to yore coat-tail."

CHAPTER XLII

THE next morning, after he had left Mary at the office, Abner walked around to the jail, taking a quiet side-street to avoid passing through the business section of the town. There was a public well in the courthouse grounds, from which some children were drawing water and taking it away in pitchers and pails. On a grassless spot near the gate some negro boys were playing a game which consisted of rolling marbles into holes in the ground, and they were disputing loudly.

On the porch of the jail Mrs. Lapsley stood with a broom in her hand, a handkerchief tied around her head. She bowed and smiled at Abner as he approached.

"I reckon you heard the news in town?" she said, unctuously.

"I hain't heard a word. What's up?" he inquired, pausing, one foot on the lowest step.

"Why, the two young moonshiners that was put in last week fer distillin' liquor in the mountains. Somebody slipped 'em some files, an' they filed their way through the steel bars an' got away as slick as goose grease. They left a note for me and Henry full o' all sorts o' foolish jokes. You know, folks all about in this neighborhood thought they was gittin' religion because they sung old-time hymns so loud an' constant. Maybe you can guess what that was for. If you can't I'll tell you, Mr. Daniel. It was just a blind to drown out the noise o' the files. The harder they worked the louder they sung an' shouted. It was a smooth trick, but Henry says we

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won't hold any more camp-meetin' an' mourners'-bench revivals under this roof. They tuck Henry in completely. He was awful sorry fer 'em. Henry has a good streak in 'im—if I do say it. He's a hard-shell Baptist; my folks all the way back was Methodists. Yes, Henry leans the right way, an' he tuck the Bible up to 'em t'other day an' marked some places fer 'em to read, but he says now that they must have been laughin' at his religious remarks. Him an' the sheriff was out with the hounds hot on their trail this mornin' before breakfast, but the prisoners tuck to water a mile below town an' throwed the scent off. I reckon they are gone fer good. I don't much care. They was a jolly pair o' boys, and they told me that it wasn't no harm to make whisky out o' the'r own corn like they did. They argued that the law was made by the Yankees up North after they robbed us of all we had during the War, and that us Southerners ought not to be dictated to from any such source."

Abner smiled indulgently. His thoughts seemed to be far from what she was saying. "How is my boy this mornin'?" he asked, irrelevantly.

"Oh, he's all right—as well as common, I reckon." Mrs. Lapsley knocked her broom on the edge of the porch floor to remove the dust from the straw. "I see J. L. Tarp has a big shoe sale on at his store. He is a spry one, ain't he? He bit me terribly on the last pair I bought from 'im. One of 'em split right across the upper. I'm goin' to show it to 'im the next time I go down. I wonder how him an' Mary Trumbley will finally make out? Henry says Tarp makes no bones about her kickin' 'im flat. He tells it all around. They've got a big joke on Tarp now. I laughed hearty when Henry told about it. It is true, fer Tarp tells it on hisse'f. Have you heard about him an' his new milliner, Bessie Williams, that he advertised so much as bein' the finest hat-trimmer in the South?"

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"I knew that such a lady was workin' fer 'im," Abner replied, casting a restless glance toward the open doorway and the stairs leading up to Howard's cell.

"Well, hain't you heard that she tuck the train an' left all of a sudden at midnight yesterday?"

"I think not," Abner said, politely. "Ef you'll excuse me, I'll walk up now an' speak to Howard."

But Mrs. Lapsley had suddenly placed her broom between him and the door, and was smiling broadly. "You really *must* hear this," she declared, with a chuckle. "It is the oddest thing I ever heard about love-makin', an' I've heard my share of such. Tarp told somebody in confidence and it leaked out. It seems that he proposed to Mary awhile back, an' when she gave 'im the mitten he made a dead set fer his new milliner. He tuck 'er to meetin' several times, an' she was togged out wonderful. Her clothes must 'a' been silk clean through, for she rustled so when she come up the aisle that the congregation couldn't hear the hymn Brother Quillan was givin' out. Her hat was a regular flower-garden, and the musk she had on her was so strong that it set everybody to coughing. Well, it seems Tarp was waiting for a good chance to pop the question, and so one night when she was working late to finish a hat for old Judge Trimble's granddaughter to wear to graduating exercises—and that girl ain't no more ready to finish schooling than I am—Tarp, as I say, sent the clerks off and stayed at the store. Well, that was his chance, and he determined to know his fate then and there. Miss Bessie was stitching away at a great rate on the hat, an' he went to count the money in the drawer and balance up his cash-book. He figured up and found he was short ten dollars. He went over the tickets and money several times, but always found that he was exactly ten out. Tarp is a close-fisted man, an' you can imagine he was bothered considerable; but still he didn't want that to interfere with his love-making,

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so he went back where Miss Bessie sat and begun. It seems that she was powerful astonished, but she finally consented to take him. Now, Tarp didn't tell *this* part—and what man would, for that's a private matter? But he must have kissed the woman or hugged her. Anyways, there was a scramble of some sort betwixt them—which don't mean much either, for many a gal that wants to be kissed will fight it off a decent length of time at first. Yes, there was a commotion of some sort, and in it a little tight wad of green paper dropped on the floor. Miss Bessie made a grab fer it, but, being gallant, Tarp got it first and looked at it. It was a ten-dollar bill, and a new one just like one Tarp remembered taking in that day himself. Now, you kin imagine that was a cold dash to a feller all het up with love. She swore it was her own money, and that she didn't know a thing about the bill he'd lost; but J. L. Tarp wasn't born stone-blind like a kitten, and love hadn't plumb closed his eyes either, so the report is that he simply told her that he wasn't willing to take the chances. She cried a lot and told Tarp she loved him; but he explained that he didn't want her about any longer. He paid her off and sent her away. I don't know who got the ten, but I'll bet he did."

"A good joke on Tarp," Abner said, absent-mindedly. "I hope Howard's appetite is improving, Mrs. Lapsley."

"Well, it hain't." The woman drew her broom out of Abner's way, and he passed through the doorway. "I've prepared everything his mammy sent, and all the good things I could tempt him with, but it comes back on the tray too often to suit me. He looks puny. He's lived out of doors a lot, and the confinement isn't good for him. Maybe he's losing hope—that will pull a healthy person down quicker than anything I know of. I know, because I've seen prisoners pine away here with us. I wish his window wasn't next to the court-house. He hears what curious folks say in the yard and at the well.

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They don't know that he is listening, and make his case out pretty bad. Most folks claim Howard ought to have owned up at the start. They all like him and think he acted in a hot temper and maybe self-defense. Henry isn't usually wrong, and, while he pretends to Howard that he believes his whole tale, he tells me that the best of men will keep back the truth to save their necks."

"I believe he's innocent, absolutely innocent," Abner said, almost in a tone of rebuke.

"I heard you was holdin' out for that," the woman said, "and I'm sure Mary Trumbley is, too. La, la! that's a pretty affair, Mr. Daniel, and sad, too! If something ain't done for Howard it will break her heart. They say him and her was fetched up side by side. Some have said that he was making a set for that rich Atlanta girl before his arrest, but I reckon that's off now, for neither her nor her mother has ever inquired about him, and he never mentions her name to me or Henry."

Abner ascended the narrow stairs slowly. The first flight was rather dark, and he had to place his feet carefully. However, there was more light in the neighborhood of Howard's cell, and as Abner drew near the bars he saw Howard rise from his cot at his approach and stand peering through the squares at him.

"Hello, Howard; how are you, my boy?" Abner asked, mastering his emotion with difficulty and trying to speak in a cheerful, offhand tone.

"Oh, I'm all right, Uncle Ab. How are you?" Abner was dismayed at the change in Howard's appearance since he had last seen him. He was paler and thinner, and worry had cut deep lines in his face. His eyes glowed with the fire of despair; his hair stood stiffly awry; and his hands quivered as they clutched the bars. "I say I'm all right, but I don't know that I am anything to boast of. I am only flesh and blood, after all, and this is a pretty tough situation. I try to hope. I keep saying

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to myself that it will come out right; but sometimes I doubt it. I know what I've got to face in my trial, and there is hardly one chance in a hundred of escaping the gallows. The more I think about it the worse the situation seems."

"Oh, you are blue," Abner returned, unsteadily. "Confinement has upset yore liver. It will do it fer the stoutest constitutions. You must keep up hope. The editorials you are writing are the finest things you ever done. Then thar's Mary—think of her, Howard."

Abner saw a look of inexpressible tenderness suffuse the wan, steel-framed face and heard the prisoner sigh.

"Lord, Lord, Uncle Ab," he said. "I seldom think of any one else here of late. If I am condemned to death I'll carry to the end the sweet thought of what she has been and is to me. That is worrying me, too, and I don't know what to do about it."

"How is it worrying you?" Abner asked.

"Why, Uncle Abner"—Howard's voice shook, and he averted his eyes—"her beautiful young life, so full of sweet unselfishness, ought not to be associated in any way with mine. I brought this thing on myself. She used to warn me against my hot temper and plead with me to control it. If I had listened to her advice I'd never have been accused of this crime, and so now some people are saying that she and I are engaged to be married. She is the most wonderful girl in all the world, and deserves a long life of happiness—she doesn't deserve having her name dragged in the mire like this. I don't care so very much for myself now. I've passed that point, but the consciousness that that dear girl is suffering through my worthless existence and may suffer even more is unbearable."

"Don't say that, my boy," Abner pleaded. "You now know what a woman's love means. You now know what many a husband don't know even after passin' a

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long life with a faithful wife. You have proof that Mary Trumbley would die fer you. Ain't that some'n'?"

Howard's breast rose under a billow of emotion. "We've never spoken of our love," he said. "We talk chiefly of our work. You see, I am not in a position to tell her how I feel. I didn't before this, and I can't now. I want her to know how I have grown to love her and lean on her since I came here, and yet I can't honorably mention it."

"I understand," Abner said, tenderly. "You needn't bother about that, though. Mary knows. She shows it in her gentle face when she comes back to the office after seein' you. She has been my mainstay in this matter, Howard. She hain't never fer one second doubted yore release. She gits that from God direct. She is sufferin' keen pain over the way you are bein' treated, but she believes, in her heart, that it will end."

"Yes, yes; I see she hopes that," Howard sighed. "But even the best of women have found their prayerful faith to be ungrounded. The world is full of injustice—why should I or that sweet girl escape it? I am trying to face the worst—the very worst—and you know what that is, Uncle Ab."

Abner was silent for a moment, then he plunged recklessly into something to which he had not intended to refer. "I've got a plan on a certain line that I don't want to mention even to you yit, Howard. I'd tell you, but I don't want to raise false hopes. Thar's a chance, that's all—a bare chance."

"I think I can guess," the prisoner said, wearily.

"You think you can, Howard?"

"Yes, I think perhaps you have an idea who really did the shooting. I've tried and tried to think it out myself."

"Yes, I think I do, my boy," Abner nodded, wistfully, as his eyes met Howard's hopeless stare; "but I hain't got

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my suspicions in a shape yit to do anything with 'em. Would you like to know who I suspicion, Howard?"

"You may tell me if you think best," was the slow, almost disinterested answer.

Abner told him, and Howard stood thinking it over for a moment, his pale face unlighted by the statement. "Have you any proof at all that Abe did it?" he asked.

The question caused the old man's eyes to waver, and his reply came hesitatingly. "No, I can't say that I have, Howard. You may think I am followin' a mighty faint scent, but it was all thar was to follow, an' I reckon thar is sech a thing as intuition. I believe he is the man, an' I'm hopin' to git 'im to confess it."

"I see." Howard's glance fell to the floor, and he inhaled a deep breath. "I can't hope that any man of exactly that type would give himself up. Abe is rough and coarse; in fact, the last man on earth that I would expect such a thing from. Life is sweet to such persons; in fact, I think they fear death more than the more educated classes. I saw him the other day—only yesterday. You know, I pass the day watching the people come and go from the court-house. It is the only amusement I have. I saw Abe come to the well to get a drink, and he stood staring up at my window for a minute. I remember that I thought he looked more disreputable than when I saw him last. He wandered about the yard, standing first in one place and then in another. There were some little groups of idlers here and there, and he approached them and looked as if he were listening to what they were saying, but not taking part. Oh, if he is the man there is no hope—that is, if it depends on a voluntary confession."

"I don't think you know 'im as well as I do—now at least," Abner said, thoughtfully. "I've been studyin' 'im through and through. I'm sure he is sorry fer you

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an' wants to do the right thing; but whether he will do it in time to help or not depends on God Almighty. It is a queer situation, my boy. I don't know that I ever seed one at all like it. All available evidence is agin the right side, an' the power of God to awaken a human soul in God's own way is the only thing left to us. I'm prayin', Mary's prayin', yore ma is prayin'—what more kin be done? Sometimes when I'm talkin' to Abe—an' I've done it several times lately—I feel somehow that I'm actually God's mouthpiece. I have another odd feelin', too, at sech times, an' that is that I almost have the Almighty's power of forgiveness—I almost have His love fer that pore dumb hulk of a man that, after all, thought he was doin' right. You don't know why I say that particular thing, but I'll tell you some day. Anyways, I have a hope that you can't have, fer I can't make you understand without you knowed *me* better. You know me on the outside, you can't know me as I am away down on the inside. A young feller like you could never know what a life-long up-hill climb could fetch to a man o' my age an' experience. Moreover, experience in *worldly* things, Howard, ain't worth a snap compared to experience in *speritual* things. I never have talked on this line to you, an' it won't do no good now. You are a-doin' exactly what I'd 'a' done at yore time o' life: you are reachin' out fer material help; but I ain't. Humph! I'm an old bachelor, but I'm fetchin' up a baby—it is a speritual one. It ain't pretty on the outside, but great beauty sometimes flashes out o' its eyes. Its name is Abe Fulton. He is jest beginnin' to toddle; he falls an' he gits up ag'in; one minute he has faith in me, an' the next it is clean gone; one minute, under God's light that seems to pour through me, he loses all fear; an' the next, as the shadow of the scaffold falls across his path, he stumbles an' holds out his hands—not to me, but to the devil, who is leadin' him, too—leadin' him back to whar he

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started from. Now, you see what I'm dependin' on. I didn't intend to let this out, but, seein' you so down-hearted this mornin', I couldn't help it. I'm goin' back to the office now. Mary wants to come, an' I know you want to see 'er."

CHAPTER XLIII

WITHIN half a mile of Trumbley's was the Hildale camp-meeting grounds, which were used annually by several Protestant churches for open-air union services for a week. The time had come around again, the farmers having laid by their crops to wait for their ripening and being free to attend. The main structure consisted of a simple oblong roof supported by unbarked posts or the trunks of young trees, and left open at the sides and ends. When the attendance was great, as in the present case, the building was enlarged by the addition of arbors of thick-leaved branches of bushes, the whole being furnished with benches without backs made of undressed planks laid on logs or stones. Between these benches and in the aisles fresh wheat-straw was spread, giving the whole spot the fragrant smell of the harvest-field. At the western end, against an abrupt moss-grown boulder, was a raised platform holding a crudely improvised pulpit, and a bench or two for distinguished visitors, such as elders, superannuated ministers, authorized exhorters, and other influential religious men in the community.

On the first Sunday of the meeting the spaces in the surrounding level woodland were well staked off and filled with housekeeping tents, each having its fireplace, where food was prepared. Besides this, many families slept in their canvas-covered road-wagons or on beds of pine-needles or hay. For this meeting a distinguished young revivalist of great oratorical power had been persuaded to preach for the entire week, and the news of his engage-

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ment had spread far into the mountains, bringing religious persons many miles to the unusual spiritual feast.

On that first Sunday morning Abner rose and looked out of his window upon the road. Wagons and buggies, and persons on horseback and afoot, were already passing, although the sun was scarcely up. He dressed himself carefully, putting on his best black trousers and coat, which was a long frock and worn without a vest in the summer; he polished his boots and tied his narrow cravat as well as he could with his clumsy fingers, and then went out on the dew-wet lawn. Here he met Mary, an empty pan under her arm. She was coming from the barn-yard, where she had been to feed the chickens.

"I thought yore ma did that job since you became a' up-to-date newspaper woman?" he jested, as she greeted him with a welcoming smile.

"I do it on Sundays," she answered. "I don't want the chickens to forget me."

"Big meetin' they are goin' to have down at the shed," he remarked, brushing some lint off the sleeve of his coat. "They say Brother Wellman is a regular wheel-hoss at whoopin' up sinners an' backsliders. You are a-goin', ain't you?"

She shook her head, put down her pan on the grass, and began to retie his cravat, which she said looked like a shoe-string. "I don't feel like it," she said, with a swift glance into his eyes, her lips quivering. "Last year Howard and I went together, and—and—well, I don't want to go."

"I remember," Abner said, seeing that her voice had completely failed her. "I remember when he come by fer you. Me 'n' him had a chat thar on the steps while you was primpin' up an' puttin' yore hat on. La, la! things have changed, hain't they? I watched you two as you passed through the gate an' strolled across the meadow to escape the dust o' the road, both of you pickin'

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flowers. I went on to meetin' an' set thar a good half-hour 'fore you an' him finally come. You made a purty sight—as purty as I'd care to see. I remember I thought that you two didn't need no cut-an'-dried religion. Thar was youth an' happiness, good will an' faith shinin' out o' yore faces. I remember how you an' him giggled out loud when the bench give way an' Brother Carroll had sech a tumble in the straw an' got up so mad that he refused to pray when they axed 'im. Them seem happy days when you look back on 'em. We ort to look *forward* fer happiness instead o' back; but we don't as a rule. I ain't quite thar yit, but I believe some human bein's—through right livin', through conformin' to the highest universal law—reach a point in old age at which the best things o' the past seem puny makeshifts compared to the bliss o' the present and the expectation of the future—a future that God will keep spreadin' out richer an' richer before 'em fer all eternity. Take a little yaller-winged butterfly an' study it, an' when you admit you can't see how it's made, or what 'twas made fer, then admit in yore heart an' brain that God kin and will give us eternal happiness that is even more wonderful in some inscrutable way. No, I feel sad like you do, to-day, Mary, but I'm goin' to meetin'. I'm goin' to set thar an' watch that big body o' folks, good, bad, an' indifferent, in their effort to reach the Almighty. They ain't goin' exactly yore road or mine, maybe, but they are a-goin'."

"I can't go to the meeting, I simply can't," Mary half sobbed. "I'm on the brink, Uncle Abner. My prayers are growing cold, mechanical, dead. It all seems a heartless mockery. I see no light."

"No light!" Abner rebuked her with glance and tone. "You don't know what you are talkin' about, child. I've a good mind to be more plain in what I say. Don't you see God's hand in it all? After the time o' which I jest spoke, when you an' Howard was so happy, things be-

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gun to happen agin the harmony of it all. He indulged his natural pride an' hot temper an' this trouble came on him. An' what was the consequence? Why, he's learnt a great lesson. An' you—you have showed that you are a woman o' brain an' power an' heart, an' have won his very soul. Mary, my child, he loves you with a love that is as rare as a flower growin' on a mountain o' ice—a love that never could 'a' been born any other way. His face melts an' glows, his voice shakes, when he talks about you an' how dear you are to 'im. He says he hain't told you about it, fer he feels unworthy of you because this blight is on 'im. Now, now, this is jest the *earthly* part of the whole divine process you an' him are goin' through. An' it ain't as bad as you think it is. You may be losin' faith an' hope, but I hain't. His love an' yore'n is too beautiful, too glorious, too God-like to ever be crushed clean out. He's goin' to be free, I tell you, girl. I simply *will not* give up. I won't, I won't! God will give us light—He will—He will!"

"Oh, Uncle Abner—Uncle Abner," Mary began, as she eagerly grasped his hands and wrung them, "you are so good—so full of faith and courage! I'm going to meeting with you. I want to be by your side to-day, for I have almost given up." Tears in her eyes, she turned and walked away.

As the services were about to begin Mary and Abner reached the shed together. Leaving him, she took a seat on the side occupied by the women, and he sank upon the last bench near the front end. He was known to be unorthodox in belief, and was seldom asked to speak or lead in prayer. The seats were rapidly filling, and men and boys pressed close against the benches on the outside. He saw Hiram Tinsley enter at the side and take a seat on the platform, bowing his head in prayer according to custom; and, as he had come alone, Abner decided that Mrs. Tinsley was averse to appearing in public. Another

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person who attracted Abner's notice was Mrs. Fulton. She was alone, and sat directly across the aisle from Abner. He noted that her face was pale and care-worn; there was a restless, furtive look in her eyes as she glanced about her, and the thought came to him that perhaps Abe's recent disturbed manner might have attracted her attention. Did the woman know—did she suspect her husband's guilt, and was her conscience troubling her for not revealing the truth? She looked in Abner's direction, saw him for the first time, and shrank back so visibly that he was sure the sight of him had startled her.

At this juncture Abner happened to glance toward the entrance and saw Pole Baker directing his wife and children to a seat, while he himself remained back among the bystanders outside. Staring steadily, Abner caught his eye and made a motion to the vacant space on the bench beside him, but, to his surprise, Pole shook his head and slyly motioned Abner to come out. Rising and joining him, Pole led him in silence away from the shed to a spot among the trees where some horses and mules were haltered to stumps and wagon-wheels.

"No meetin' fer me to-day," were Pole's first words. "Got other fish to fry."

"What's up?" Abner asked, eagerly.

"I'm watchin' that man o' ours," Pole said. "I don't want 'im to make a move that I don't see. He's a-settin' on a log right back o' the pulpit now. I followed him an' his wife from the'r cabin till I had to jine Jane an' the children down the road a piece. I can't tell Jane about this, an' blame me ef I don't have as hard work gittin' her to let me alone as all the rest put together. You see, Uncle Ab, ef I don't let her know exactly whar I've been, and what fer, she puts it down to some woman devilment o' mine. She seed me come out o' the thicket down the road jest now, an' hain't spoke a word since. Ef she says any prayer to-day it will be that the Lord will bring me to

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judgment. I believe when a feller tries to turn over a new leaf an' git good that the Lord will help 'im in some ways; but the devil will git at 'im through his wife. It was a cold-blooded business arrangement betwixt me 'n' Jane at the start, but she's pinnin' down on me like a gal o' sixteen goin' through 'er fust love spasm. She's raked up every bad thing I ever was guilty of, an' you know yore-se'f that 'u'd keep 'er busy. I tell 'er I'm done with all that sort o' thing, but jest let me black my boots, shave up, or put on a clean shirt, an' she wants to know whar the woman's hidin'."

"What are you watchin' Abe to-day fer?" Abner asked, his thoughts far from his friend's domestic affairs.

"Why, I jest imagined," Pole answered, "since I ketched Abe prayin' t'other day, that maybe this rousin' meetin' might work on his conscience in the way you spoke of. I thought I'd keep an eye on 'im, anyhow."

Abner was silent for several minutes, then, facing his companion, he said:

"You started me out on this particular line, Pole, an' you'll deserve most o' the credit if any good comes from it. I don't feel right in keepin' you out of it so much. I'd 'a' let you do more, but I was afeard two on the job would scare 'im off. You are cautious, Pole, an' I want you to do some'n' fer me this mornin'. Don't you think you could run across Abe sorter by accident-like an' say some'n' or other in a' offhand, roundabout way that 'u'd tend to make 'im sorry fer Howard?"

"I reckon I could, Uncle Ab, an' I'll try it ef you think it will do any good."

"Well, go ahead, but don't stay long, fer I'm goin' to talk to 'im myself this mornin'. Let me know when you are through, an' I'll take some step or other."

CHAPTER XLIV

LEAVING Abner among the trees, Pole walked around the shed till he was close to where Abe Fulton sat on the log, his shaggy head down. Pole first stood among the men and boys just outside the shed, and then, managing to catch Fulton's roving glance, he lazily slouched back to him.

"You hain't got a good seat, Abe," he smiled, cordially; "but it's better 'n one you have to stay on till the doxology is sung. I reckon you are like me, an' 'u'd rather be out whar you kin whittle a bit without disturbin' them sanctified folks."

The man addressed made a failure of a smile. "My wife's in thar, but I didn't want to go," he muttered. "I hain't a member." He moved farther toward the end of the log, and Pole sat down, taking his knife from his pocket and beginning to cut a straight sprout of hickory growing at his feet.

"I'm a backslider," he laughed. "I've slid an' slid down grade, Abe, till it 'u'd take a railroad-derrick to hoist me to a seat amongst the favored. Thar is so many sad things in the world that it takes the heart out of a feller. I'm worried right now. I've got a friend, Paul Chester—you know 'im, I reckon, Abe? He's a good-hearted feller, but he was runnin' a 'blind tiger' in town, an' now the pore devil is in jail. He sent fer me, an' I went to see 'im. I expected to find 'im down in the mouth; but, la me! he didn't care so much fer what happened to 'im as he did fer some'n' else. It seems that his cage is right across

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from the one Howard Tinsley's in, an' the sight o' Howard's awful condition made 'im think his own case wasn't nothin' to compare to it. Paul couldn't talk o' nothin' but Howard. I took a peep at Howard through the bars, an' I certainly understood what Paul meant. He's wasted away to a bare shadow, an' it looks like all faith in man an' God has left 'im. It seems strange, but Howard is still holdin' out that he's innocent. Paul told me that he was afeard that Howard would kill hisse'f. Paul believes Howard is innocent—he says he believes it because Howard looks like it in the face an' has sech a forgivin' nature even to them that is agin 'im. It seems like Howard don't hold no grudge agin anybody, but he's plumb give up. He told Paul that he wouldn't care so much ef he really had killed Craig, because Craig was sech a bad character, but what he hated was that he couldn't git anybody to believe his word."

Pole paused, and Fulton suddenly fixed an unreadable stare on him.

"What do *you* think about it?" he asked, his thick lip hanging loosely, his big right hand clutching his knee.

Pole was taken slightly aback by the sudden demand on his inventive power, and he blinked visibly.

"Me? Well, it's like this, Abe: you see, I've heard so many conflictin' reports that I hardly know what to believe. The truth is, I'm so sorry fer Howard, an' his mammy, an' fer that nice gal that's workin' in his place, goin' to see 'im every day an' prayin' fer 'im so hard that—well, I hain't fully made up my mind, though I'm inclined to take his word. I've knowed 'im sence he was a little tot, an' I hain't never knowed 'im to lie. I'll tell you one thing that I'd almost do, though, Abe. I hain't done no particular good in the world—I've been a bad egg from the start, an'—an'—well, you'll laugh, I reckon, at the idea, but considerin' all that lies in front o' Howard, I'll be damned ef I wouldn't be willin' to take his place

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an' let 'im go free. The Lord made me, an' it is stated some'r's in the Good Book that thar hain't no act known to man higher 'n to die fer another, an' I know that act would find favor on high. I know it; I jest know it."

The singing was beginning under the shed. The straw was rustling under foot as the congregation rose. A verse was sung, and the minister began to intone another in a clear, mellow voice. Abe was now staring at the ground; and Pole, closely watching him from the corner of his eyes, saw a quiver pass over him. Pole decided that he had said all that was wise, and that his prompt departure now would strengthen the effect of his words, so he yawned carelessly and rose. "Well, I'll be goin'," he said. "This meetin' means that I eat a cold dinner to-day, an' I don't care much fer that. Hot stuff right out o' the pan an' pot suits me."

"Hold on; wait a minute!" Fulton turned suddenly and put out his hand, only to let it fall back upon his knee. He swallowed several times, but seemed unable to proceed. Pole sat down again on the log.

"What is it, Abe?" he asked, with difficulty suppressing the tense expectation in his face and voice.

"I jest wanted to ax a question," Fulton faltered. "I don't want to go to any o' them in thar, because I know what they would say, but I—I want to ax you. Is all that singin' an' prayin' in thar pure poppycock, or do they mean it?"

Pole reflected, a flush of embarrassment rising into his cheeks; he felt that he was being drawn into Abner Daniel's province, and was conscious of his inability fully to cope with the situation.

"I'll tell you, Abe, it's like this, I reckon," he said, finally. "Some of 'em are dead in earnest—them that's done wrong an' know it, but I think all—even down to the youngest—git a benefit in some shape or other."

"Then you think"—Abe's somnolent eyes seemed to

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burn from fires of agony and indecision—"that thar really is sech a thing as a God?"

"Oh yes; oh yes." Pole felt himself on firmer ground. "Scripture says, 'The fool hath said in his heart that thar ain't no God.' Oh yes, thar is one, Abe, but I begin to believe as old Abner Daniel does, that He hain't exactly the sort of a God that ever did tell anybody precisely how many nails to drive in the side of a house or dicker with the devil over the best way to tantalize a feller as good as old Job was. Yes, thar's a God, an', whatever He is, He is all right. You can depend upon that. Did you ever listen to old Ab talk? Well, he's a good un."

"That's one thing I want to ax you about." Abe suddenly leaned forward. It was as if he almost held his breath in anxiety. "You've knowed 'im a long time an' had dealin's with 'im; do you think he would give a man good advice, a—a—man in troub—a man bothered in his mind over anything—business or any private matter?"

Pole's eyes flashed against his will. He averted his face that the eager expression of his blinking eyes might not be read. He pretended to reflect, then he said: "Thar ain't a shadow of a doubt about old Ab's heart bein' right, Abe. Yes, he's a good man—not many round here know 'im as well as I do. He'd saw off his right arm any day to help a person in distress, an', la me! how he hates to see a friend take a wrong step!"

"But he's sorter tricky, ain't he?" Fulton asked.

"He may be about little triflin' matters, Abe, sech as hoss-tradin' or playin' a harmless joke, but not about big, serious matters. La me! that old man knows me like a book. He's traveled all the way to Atlanta more 'n once to git me out o' hock in a spree—payin' out his own money fer my fine an' takin' me to a hotel whar he'd set an' spin yarns as ef nothin' out o' the way had happened. He's bought new clothes fer me an' fetched me back home, an' never told a soul. Lie? Yes, old Ab will lie, too;

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he'd swear to my wife—my fust un, that I was so rough with—after a trip like that, that me 'n' him had been away on business. I've heard 'im say that it wasn't no harm to lie ef you saved innocent people from sufferin' by it."

"Then you'd take his advice about a serious—a very serious matter?" Abe muttered, almost indistinctly.

"You bet I would," Pole answered, promptly, "especially ef it concerned right or wrong." Pole rose again. The minister was beginning to preach. "So long, Abe," he smiled. "I reckon I'll listen to that sermon. I always feel better after a good un, an' they say this chap is all right."

"Wait a minute." Fulton raised his shadowy eyes with the timidity of a frightened child. "I want to see Abner Daniel to-day—this mornin'—*right now*, ef—ef I kin. Ef you see 'im—he's in thar, I seed 'im come awhile ago—ef you see 'im, tell 'im I'm back here an' want to see 'im."

"All right. I know whar he is, an' I'll send 'im to you, Abe. So long."

Skirting the shed to reach the spot where he had left Abner, Pole saw him seated on the tongue of a wagon whittling a stick.

"Huh!" Abner grunted, as he looked up with an anxious smile. "You certainly took long enough. Did you go home to dinner with 'im?"

"He's primed an' cocked ready to dump the whole thing." Pole smiled broadly. "They say ef you want to catch a bird fust sprinkle salt on his tail, an' I've got Abe kivered from head to foot. Ef I do say it, I worked 'im to a queen's taste. He said fer me to send you to 'im right off, an' ef I was you I'd not waste any time. He's got his nerve now, but he may lose it in a minute. He wiggles like a dyin' snake."

Abner's face beamed as he stood up and brushed the

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shavings from his trousers. "I know the sort Abe is," he said, "an' we must strike while the iron is hot. I'll tell you what you kin do fer me, Pole. I want you to go to my stable an' hitch up my hoss an' buggy an' drive it this way as quick as you kin. The sheriff is under the shed, but he hain't got nothin' to ride in, an' he'll want to take our man to town ef this thing goes through. Dill will be powerful astonished, but he will act when he catches on."

"All right," Pole answered. "I won't waste a minute."

With his usual deliberation in grave or important matters, Abner sauntered round the tent, still whittling his piece of wood. Once he paused and searched the silent congregation till he had located Dill among the worshipers near the rear; then he went on to the spot where Fulton sat. The man's profile was to him, and a chill of disappointment shot through the observer, for the face was not as he had expected to find it. It was a mask of fear and rebellion rather than one of humility and contrition. Hearing his step, Abe turned his eyes upon Abner and sullenly lowered them.

"I met Pole Baker round t'other side the shed," Abner began. "He said you wanted to see me, Abe."

"Did he say I wanted to see you?" Abe muttered, without looking up.

"Yes, he said he thought you did." Abner eased himself down on the log, his knife and stick poised between his knees. "I 'lowed maybe you'd want to see me 'fore long. A load like you got can be toted jest so long, an' then the whole nature rebels, an'—"

"Thar ain't but *one* thing I want to see you about." The words were almost spluttered forth, and the speaker stroked his flabby lips as if to shape and steady them. "I've been thinkin' over the—the way you've been talkin' to me here lately, an'—an' while I was talkin' to Pole I made up my mind that I wouldn't put up with it any

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longer—not another day. Do you understand that? You can't browbeat me an' dog my steps like you've been doin'. I've got my rights the same as you or any other man. This is a free country. You don't wear no detective's badge nor carry no policeman's club that I ever seed. You are jest a man like me. Ef you *think* I've—I've done a certain thing you kin *think* it all you want to, but—but you hain't got a speck o' proof, an' the way you abused me t'other night has got to stop."

Abner's face, while full of disappointment, was firm. There was a touch of sharp vindictiveness in his tone when he replied.

"Did you send Pole Baker to me to say this?" he inquired, his gaze fixed on the all but closed eyelids before him.

"Yes," muttered Abe.

"That's a lie, Abe Fulton." Abner had never spoken with more confidence in a statement or with less fear of contradiction. "That is a deliberate lie, an' you know it!"

"You—you dare—" Fulton drew himself up straight, and clenched his fist as if for a fight; but Abner slid close to him and touched him firmly on the knee.

"Stop, Abe!" he commanded, sternly. "Listen to me. You hain't competent to manage fer yorese'f in this thing. You are like a straw betwixt two whirlwinds. One second you are driven by the right force, an' the next you fall into the wrong. You are waverin' betwixt the sunlight o' God an' the darkness o' the devil's abode. You can't hold out, an' you know it. You've got too much sense to believe that you kin keep up this awful fight any longer. No soul in Hell ever suffered more 'n you've suffered since you bottled this thing up inside o' you. Do you think you'd suffer less as the time draws nigh fer that innocent boy to stand trial fer what you done? No, sir! Day after day, night after night, hour after hour, minute after minute, yore agony would keep on pilin' up.

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Men have toted sech-like crimes fer forty year an' then crawled to the Bar o' Man an' Throne o' God to git peace o' soul. You see what you are sufferin' now—do you think it wouldn't be wuss ef you was to allow Howard Tinsley to shoulder what you done? You've got this sin in you. It is wuss 'n the most terrible disease. Yore yaller-green face shows it; it leaks like sweat out o' the pores o' yore skin. You look like a damned creature walkin' about to show folks the consequences o' wrong actin' an' rebellion to God an' His law. You want to do right, an' would, but the devil fills you with fear an' won't let you. Thar ain't nothin' to be afraid of. When a sinner does right, the Almighty takes 'im in His arms like a frettin' baby an' soothes 'im with the love that's eternal. Abe, Abe, Abe! Listen to me! Under that shed thar a good, holy man is tryin' to p'int all them folks to a higher life. Let me p'int it out to you. He'll be callin' up mourners in a few minutes, an' men an' women will be fallin' on the'r knees an' beggin' fer mercy. Abe, you don't have to beg fer mercy. Ef you will jest put yorese'f in God's care in this thing a sweet peace will fall on you as light as dew, and you will be filled with a joy that you never dreamt of."

Abner paused. Fulton's whole body seemed to have wilted. He swayed back and forth in the wind of indecision. His big mouth was open, his eyes downcast. Several minutes passed. Then something quite unexpected happened. A woman approached. It was Mrs. Fulton. She wore a dingy gingham sunbonnet, and it was drawn so far down over her eyes that her face was hidden from view. She failed even to speak to Abner, but sat down on the log close to her husband. She put a thin, toil-hardened hand on his knee and pressed it consolingly. No one spoke, and the situation was embarrassing to Abner, who feared that his best chance was escaping him. Suddenly Abner thought of a desperate

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course to pursue. It might fail, but something had to be done, and that quickly.

"I've been tryin' to prove to Abe, Mrs. Fulton, that I'm his friend—" he began, but to his surprise she interrupted him.

"I know it." She pushed back her bonnet, and he saw a colorless face full of agony framed by the cheap blue cloth. "I watched you from the shed. I seed you come an' set down by 'im, an' knowed what you wanted. I know Abe's trouble. I've knowed it all along, an' I've tried to git 'im to do right. I love 'im, but I can't keep on livin' with 'im like it is now, Mr. Daniel. He sees things in the dark an' screams out in terror. It is killin' me. I can't see the innocent suffer, nuther. I'd be takin' part ef I did. The Lord will help Abe ef he will turn to 'Im. He killed Craig. He won't deny it to me; but he done it out o' pity fer pore Susy. I don't believe the law will be hard with 'im when the whole truth is out. Bein' a pore man, Abe is afeard that havin' no money to hire a lawyer, he won't git justice, but—"

"That needn't bother 'im, Mrs. Fulton," Abner said, gently. "I'm a man o' my word, an' I'll pledge every cent I got to his defense. I'll do that, an', moreover, I'll turn the influence o' my paper to him. I'll show the public how the matter stands."

"Oh, Abe, Abe, listen!" the woman cried. "You know I wouldn't advise you wrong. You must give in—you must—you just must!"

Silence fell. Abe's head sank lower till his chin rested on his hair-grown chest. A quiver passed through the broad shoulders beneath the tattered shirt. A wave of music came from the shed. The congregation was singing, and out of the sweeping melody rose the clearly spoken words of the preacher urging the repentant to come forward and take his extended hand.

"I'll do it," the two listeners heard Abe say, under his

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breath. "I'm willin'; what do you want me to do? I won't hold back no longer."

"Dill's under the shed," Abner suggested. "He's the one fer you to go with, Abe. He's a good feller, an' will treat you right. Stay here with yore wife, an' I'll go git 'im. My hoss an' buggy is down the road a piece, an' you an' him kin ride away before the meetin's over."

"All right—git 'im. I won't back down ag'in, Mr. Daniel. Git 'im. I'll wait here with my wife."

Ten minutes later Abner stood at the end of the shed waiting for Mary. The main body of the congregation was fast scattering away among the trees, tents, and wagons and along the various roads; but Mary was not in view. Presently he saw her in a little group gathered about the minister at the platform. Suddenly she turned and came down the straw-strewn aisle. Her sweet face bore traces of tears, which had dried on her cheeks. She smiled faintly when she reached Abner, and turned away with him.

"I went up and gave the preacher my hand along with the rest," she said. "I am sorry I kept you waiting. I stayed back till the very last. I had no idea of ever doing a thing like that again. You may think it silly of me, after our talks on the subject; but all at once it occurred to me that it was a certain form of pride that was holding me back, and I want to be humble. I'm trying to be humble, for it seems to me that only through the deepest humility can I reach God's ear, and I *have* to reach it, Uncle Abner—I simply *have* to! I'll die if I don't. I can't say the step I took helped at all, but I don't want to leave a single thing untried. God's face still seems turned from me. As I held the minister's hand just now, and he was saying things that he meant as comfort, a great bitterness swept over me. I looked down and saw Jennie Gore's face as she knelt at the front

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bench. It was shining as if her soul were blazing within her, and she has never suffered like this in her life. I saw Tom Sheppard, who is converted afresh after every long spree. He was happy, clapping his hands and shouting. I saw all that and knew that Howard—poor Howard—” She choked up. Her voice died on the still air. She shuddered, and a sob escaped her.

Abner caught her arm. He seemed to have difficulty in steadying his voice. He was half afraid to tell her his good news without preparation. Presently he swept his long arm slowly in the direction of the town, and cleared his throat.

“Look at the road down by the creek,” he said. “Don’t you see a cloud o’ dust? It’s the only dust anywhere in sight, an’ it looks ugly agin the blue sky an’ white clouds on sech a purty, still day, don’t it?”

She said nothing, only raising her wet eyes half inquiringly to his.

“Yes, it’s a’ ugly sight,” Abner went on, “in all the green an’ blue about it, an’ yit right in its middle is some’n’ good—some’n’ splendid—some’n’ that will make you happier ’n you ever was in yore life. Can you guess what it is, Mary?”

“No,” she said, wonderingly, and with a little tremor of hope as she saw his eyes twinkling.

“It’s Jeff Dill in my buggy takin’ Abe Fulton to jail. He’s confessed the whole thing. Howard will come back in the buggy after a while, an’ we’ll all spend the evenin’ together.”

CHAPTER XLV

CONCLUSION

THE young people of Darley, led by Frank Reymond, were giving a dance to Mary and Howard at the old Johnston House. Never before had such an elaborate affair taken place in the town. Not only were all the younger set present, but old gentlemen and ladies who had long since given up such amusements insisted upon going that they might do honor to the courageous young couple whose engagement was known to all. Conspicuous among the participants was Abner Daniel, who had never appeared to be so happy. Good music was furnished by a band from Atlanta; costly refreshments were served; and the ball-room and parlors were decorated with ever-greens and flowers.

While the grand march was taking place Abner slipped into the office of the hotel, where Sugart, in evening clothes and wearing a buttonhole bouquet, which Mary had pinned upon his lapel, stood behind the counter.

"I thought I seed Pole Baker in here a minute ago," Abner said, anxiously. "Whar is he?"

"He's just gone to his horse," Sugart replied, affably. "He said he was going out home."

Hurrying out at the door to a hitching-rack at the side of the house, Abner saw his friend about to mount his horse.

"Hey, hold on, thar!" Abner cried. "You ain't a-goin' to sneak away from here like this."

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Pole laughed merrily as he turned to Abner, the rein of his bridle on his arm, a riding-switch in his hand. "Ef you think I'm goin' to go in thar with these old clothes on when you are rigged out like a dude an' got all them women taggin' on to yore coat-tails, you don't know me. You are a bachelor, but I'm an old married man, Uncle Ab, with a wife and a gang o' young uns that's already been abed a good hour. I ain't a-goin' to try to keep the pace with you young bloods. Say, I'm goin' to make a prediction. You don't know it, but you'll be married before long. I'll bet my hat on it. You are a woman's man. You are a sly old duck with that slick suit, white tie, an' pleated shirt on. I've a good mind to rub some o' my hosshairs off on you. Oh my! who clipped yore whiskers? Dang my old hide, ef you hain't got powder on yore cheeks! It's a wonder you hain't got white burial gloves on like the rest o' the boys."

Abner glanced down at his new clothes with a slightly crestfallen look. "Oh, I jest 'lowed I'd fix up a little to do honor to them two. They are so happy an' popular with everybody. I've heard plenty of good news to-day. Abe Fulton's case is in tip-top shape; even the district attorney admits it. Moreover, the town is on a boom, an' me an' Howard will have our hands full. Wait fer supper, anyway, Pole. You helped put this thing through, an' I don't feel right about the way you are actin'."

"I've been paid—more 'n paid, Uncle Ab." Pole put his foot into the heavy wooden stirrup and swung himself into the saddle. "Fust Howard shuck hands with me an' thanked me with tears in his eyes. Then some'n' else happened. I was down at the spring below Trumbley's yesterday, an' Mary come to me. I thought she had some'n' to say about some'n' or other—my wife an' the children, or some'n' like that—but she didn't speak a word. She jest come up to me—so she did—an' put 'er arms around my scrubby old neck an' kissed me. Then she

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drapped 'er head on my shoulder an' cried like a happy child. Great God, Uncle Ab! you kin dyke up; you kin bow an' scrape an' cavort about to that music in thar with all the women under the sun ef you want to, but I wouldn't swap places with you. The War didn't kill out slavery, fer I'm a slave to that gal, an' will be as long as I live."

When Pole had ridden down the unlighted street Abner turned back into the hotel. "Pole's all right now," he thought, "but I wish I'd passed my hand over his hip-pocket. He's apt to git drunk when he's plumb happy, an' he's been sober quite a spell now. Well, ef he does I'll look after 'im—God bless his soul!"

The evening was wearing away to the patter of feet, gay laughter, merry talk, and music. Mrs. Langham lay in her bed trying to sleep. Suddenly she heard the door of her daughter's room creak as it opened. She decided that it was Cora who had come up for something pertaining to her toilet, and she listened for further sounds from the room; but none came. Mrs. Langham lay still for several minutes, then, hearing nothing more, she rose wonderingly and softly opened the door between the two rooms. Her eyes first fell on the bureau, but Cora was not at it. Next she looked at the bed; it was smooth and untouched. There was no light in the room save what was shed by the moonbeams which fell upon the floor, and on the sill of the window looking out, silent and still, sat Cora.

"Why, daughter! What does this mean?" the mother exclaimed. "Has anything happened—are you sick?"

"No, I'm simply—simply tired, mother," Cora said. "Don't bother about me. I'm going to bed in a few minutes."

"To bed?" Mrs. Langham repeated, in surprise. "Why, the dance is not more than half over—supper has not been served."

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"I don't care," Cora answered, her glance still on the moonlit scene. "I—I've danced enough for to-night. I'm tired, awfully tired, and—and bored. I'm not hungry, either, and so why should I wait for supper?"

Mrs. Langham stared at the marble-like face in the white light; then, taking a deep breath, she drew up a chair and sat down close to her daughter.

"I may as well confess it," she half faltered. "I'm worried over the way you are acting. Nothing interests you here lately. I know from the way you talk—from the remarks you drop—that you don't read the letters through that come from our friends at home. You are not the same, darling—you are completely changed. Oh, tell me what is the matter!"

Cora's lips moved as if for speech, then she simply passed her delicate hand over her eyes and brow, sighed softly, and was silent.

"There is only one thing left for me to think," Mrs. Langham said, almost resentfully, "and that is that—you are really in love with Howard Tinsley."

"No, no, I'm not—that is, I don't think I am really, really in love with him. I don't think I could love a—a man who loves some one else as—as he does Mary Trumbley, but—but, mother—"

Cora's voice seemed to lose itself in the clinging moonlight.

"But what?" Mrs. Langham demanded. "Go on, go on. I want to understand this thing. I'm worried to death over it."

"I may as well be frank." Cora turned her face directly toward the grim one in the shadow. "Mother, as I looked at Howard and Mary to-night and read their faces I realized what life can mean to persons who look at it right. They are alive. I am dead. They have something to look forward to that is worth while; but I have nothing—absolutely nothing! You expect me—"

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father expects me—to go back to Atlanta and take up the sort of thing I have been through every season since I came out in society. I am willing to do it for your sakes, but I myself shall be in a mummy's body. Life means more than our set thinks it does. I know what real love and genuine self-sacrifice mean, for I have seen examples of them here in the mountains. I know what another thing means, too. I've had even a closer view of that. I know what fear of an empty world's opinion will bring to one. I know the black curse of spiritual cowardice. Mother, I know what I have lost, and what a better woman has gained. I have lost the love of a good man."

THE END

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